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Answer

A FULL
ANSWER
TO A LATE
VIEW OF THE INTERNAL EVIDENCE
OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.
IN A
DIALOGUE
BETWEEN A
Rational CHRISTIAN and his FRIEND.

BY THE EDITOR OF
BEN MORDECAI'S LETTERS TO ELISHA LEVI.

—Thou com'st in such a QUESTIONABLE Shape,
That I will speak to thee.

SHAKESPEARE.

L O N D O N:
Printed for J. WILKIE, in St. Paul's Church-Yard.

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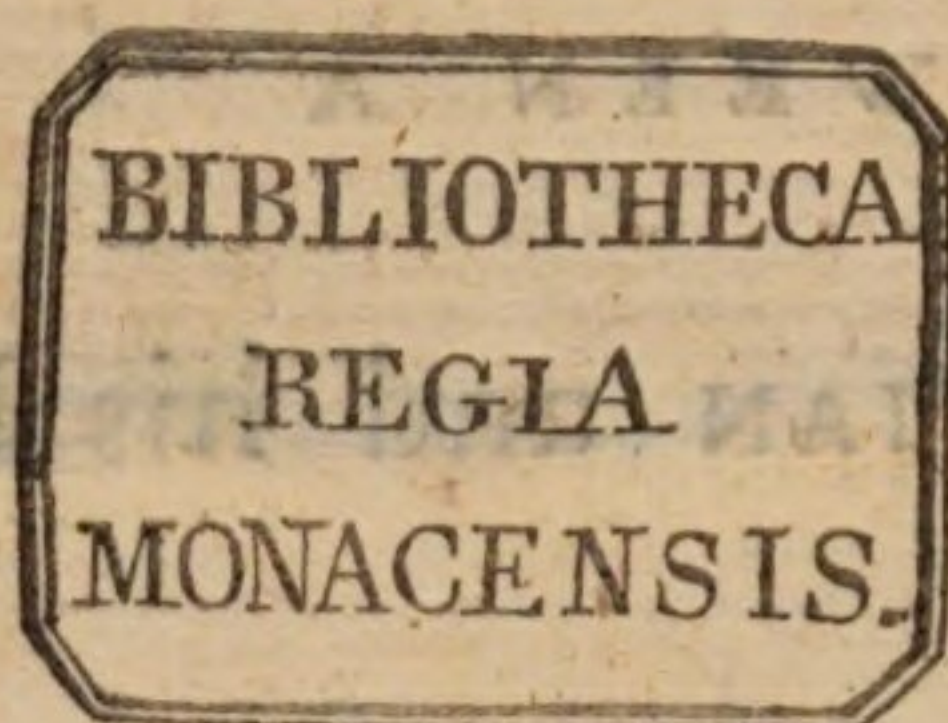
A FULL ANSWER

TO A LATE

VIEW OF THE INTERNAL EVIDENCE
OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

IN A

DIALOGUE



By the Editor of
The Monthly Repository to British Liberty.

— Even if we had a question of
that which is to be done.

L O N D O N :
Printed for J. Johnson, at the Church-Yard.

THE
P R E F A C E.

IF the Doctrines I propose to examine in the following pages had appeared in no other form, than as they were first presented to the world above fifteen years ago, as the Sentiments of a Sceptic, and in the middle of a large book; I should not have taken any notice of them. But as they have been of late new vamp'd, and delivered as the opinions of a Christian, and are addressed to such superficial Readers, as may not be sufficiently aware of their mischievous tendency, I could not help thinking it would be of dangerous consequence, if they should continue any longer unexamined.

The writer of the View says of it,
“ if it ever be admitted into such good

“ company [as the busy and idle, &c.]
 “ they will immediately, I know, de-
 “ termine it must be the work of some
 “ Enthusiast, or Methodist, some Beggar
 “ or some Madman. I shall therefore
 “ beg leave to assure them, that the
 “ author is very far removed from all
 “ these characters,” p. 189.—I do not,
 in the following pages, take upon me
 to ascertain the author or his character;
 I propose only to speak to the doctrines
 which are contained in the book and
 their consequences; and these appear
 to me to coincide so nearly with the
 sceptical Savoyard Vicar’s confession of
 Faith, which we find delineated in the
 third volume of Mr. Rousseau’s *Emilius*
 and *Sophia*, that I can look upon it in
 no other light, than as the same plan
 enlarged and embellished, and only so
 far altered as was thought necessary to
 fit it for the mouth of another Person,
 who might call himself a Christian; as
 if it were possible for the Faith of a
 Christian to be compatible with the
 many doubts, uncertainties, and objec-
 tions

tions of a Sceptic which still appear in it.

The inconsistency of the Savoyard, as described by Rousseau, is perfectly natural and characteristick : he must be supposed, as a Sceptick, to frame objections, and then distrust the validity of them: accordingly he raises a number of imaginary difficulties to the Christian scheme, and particularly to the proof of it from Miracles and Prophecies, and argues against it as incredible, p. 115, &c. He then begins to doubt his own arguments, and says, “ There are so many solid Reasons both
“ for and against its authority, that,
“ not knowing what to conclude, I
“ neither admit nor reject it.” After this he appears to be so struck with admiration at the *diction* and *morality* and *purity* of the Gospel, and the *superiority* of the character of *Jesus* above that of *Socrates*; that he concludes in the same doubtful manner; “ if *Socrates* was a
“ Sage, the life and death of *Jesus* were
“ those of a *God*; and yet with all this,
“ the same Gospel abounds with *incre-*

“*dible* Relations, with circumstances *re-*
 “*pugnant* to Reason, which it is im-
 “possible for a man of sense either to
 “*conceive* or to *admit*.”—All this in-
 consistency is natural enough in the
 mouth of a Sceptic, as he fairly con-
 fesses himself to be; “such, says he,
 “is the involuntary Scepticism in which
 “I remain,” p. 139. But it is very
 inconsistent even in a sensible Deist to
 talk in this manner: and when such
 language is put into the mouth of a
 Christian, nothing can appear more un-
 natural, heterogeneous, and exotic: the
 whole Plan becomes deformed and out
 of all Proportion.

And yet the View makes no scruple
 to raise the same kind of objections as
 the Vicar does, and to leave them un-
 answered.—He admires the *diction*, the
morality, the *purity*, the *beauty* of the
 Christian precepts, and our Saviour’s
perfect example; but not a word is said
 in proof of any divine attestation to his
 divine mission by either of them; on
 the contrary, the chief design of the
 View is to shew, that the truth of
 Chris-

Christianity must be first proved, before either Miracles or Prophecies can be believed: the consequence of which must be, when these pillars of our faith are removed, that it can never be proved at all. With the same spirit of Scepticism the View objects to the Scriptures, that in them are found “ errors, “ inconsistencies, fabulous stories, and “ false facts, and false Philosophy “ (p. 123), and doctrines contradicting “ all the Principles of human Reason “ and all our Ideas of divine Justice “ (p. 159), and narrations accommodated to the ignorance and superstition of the times, or pious frauds intended to impress on vulgar minds a higher Reverence of the power and sanctity of Christ” (p. 125); some of which objections are absolutely inconsistent with the Christian Faith; and, if true, must overturn it.

Of this the View seems to be conscious; and therefore, to preserve the name of a Christian, after betraying the cause, he is obliged, in support of his Hypothesis, to attempt the most extra-

ordinary manœuvre in Logick, that ever was thought of, but which is absolutely necessary to save appearances, and keep him within the pale of Popish orthodoxy. The argument is two-fold, and cuts on both edges.

1st, That it is a mark of Truth in the doctrines of Christianity, that they are *agreable* to Reason.

2d, That it is, or at least it *may*, be a mark of Truth in the doctrines of Christianity, that they are *repugnant* to Reason (p. 176. 179).

Now I leave it to the judgment of the Reader whether Christian or Deist, if he is but a man of sense, whether this ingenious argument does not shew a greater inconsistency in the View, than any thing that has been asserted by the Vicar, or any thing that Mr. Voltaire has laid to the charge of Mr. Rousseau through his whole Prophecy of him ^a.

But here I can't help observing, that, though the behaviour of the *Vicar* is more consistent with the character of a

^a See the Annual Register for 1761, p. 208.

Sceptic ; than the *View* is with that of a *Christian* ; yet the Vicar comes off at last as *poorly* as the *View*. What is to be done, says the Vicar, amidst all these *Contradictions* ? To which he answers, “ Be modest and circumspect, and regard in Silence what cannot be *disproved* or *comprehended*.”—The question was, what is to be done when we meet with the *contradictions* just mentioned ; viz. “ *incredible* relations and “ circumstances *repugnant* to reason, “ which it is impossible for a man of “ Sense either to *conceive* or *admit* ?” and the Vicar answers, that we should be modest and regard in silence *what cannot be disproved* or *comprehended*.—Is this any answer to the question ? It may be proper enough to regard in silence what *cannot be disproved* or *comprehended* ; but what has this to do with *contradictions*, and circumstances *repugnant to reason* ? &c. We are certainly able to disprove and to comprehend *contradictions*, or we should not know them to *be* such.—I shall therefore beg leave to give a very different answer to the

X P R E F A C E.

the Vicar's question, and to assert, that among all the *difficulties* we meet with in the Scripture, and the many things therein, which we do *not understand*, there are *no contradictory doctrines, no incredible Relations*, nothing *repugnant to Reason*, nor any thing required of us to be believed, which it is impossible for a *man of Sense* to *conceive or admit*. This is the opinion of the most respectable of our Protestant Divines: and I can see no good Reason why even the Deists should chuse to take their notions of Christianity from Rousseau's Emilius, or their notions of Morality from his Eloise, rather than from them. And these not only declare that Christianity is defensible upon *argument*, and agreeable to Reason upon the strictest examination, but many of them have defended it upon those Principles. I shall trouble you with one or two quotations, which now lie before me, to prove this. Bishop Hare says, " Surely
" it is a commendable design to explaine
" Scripture difficulties, and to remove
" the Objections of profane men, by
" shew-

“ shewing, there is nothing in the
 “ sacred writings but what is true and
 “ *Rational*.” — And Dr. Sykes, in his
 preface to the second Edition of his
 Essay on the Truth of Christianity, says,
 “ It has always been my desire to see
 “ Religion treated as a *Rational* thing,
 “ free from all absurdity and folly.—
 “ The Religion of nature is capable
 “ of the strictest Evidence ; and there-
 “ fore *that* is never to be deviated from
 “ or given up.—The Religion of Christ,
 “ as it lies in the New Testament, is
 “ perfectly agreeable-to, and consistent-
 “ with, what natural Religion teacheth ;
 “ and so it will be always found by
 “ them that examine its truth with
 “ Sincerity.”

Now this is a proper Principle for
 the Christian and Deist to join issue
 upon : and if the Christian really wishes
 to convert the Deist, he will use no
 other : for he knows that the Deist will
 admit of no argument, that contra-
 dicts his Reason or his *natural* Religion.
 In the mean time the Christian will be
 particularly cautious to say nothing, that
 reflects

reflects upon his adversary's understanding or sincerity, and may serve to irritate rather than convince : for Christianity has been so amazingly misrepresented to many sensible and worthy Men, especially to those who have travelled into popish countries, that it is impossible for them to believe it, till they get rid of their prejudice against it upon this account. This false notion should therefore be first of all attended to, and rectified, with patience and candour.—And this consideration will make way for two preliminary articles, without which, it will be to no purpose for the parties to enter into any discussion upon the question whether Christianity be true or false.

1. It must be agreed upon to be unfair dealing to object, or insist-on, any doctrines as parts of Revelation, which cannot be proved to be revealed in Scripture.

2. It must be agreed upon to be unfair dealing to insist on any such doctrines as are contradictory to Reason,
or

or to the divine attributes, or inconsistent with one another.

It is certain that no sensible Deist will be converted to Christianity upon any other Principles : and he that attempts it will be more likely to be converted *himself* into a *Sceptic*.

But if the doctrines of Christianity can be proved agreeable to the understanding, and consistent with the nature of God to revele, and the nature of Man to receive, as our greatest Divines believe and declare ; we may reasonably hope to bring over to the belief of it, all such men of Sense, as can be persuaded to part with their ill-grounded prejudices against it, and to examine the subject strictly and impartially. —

And there is the more reason for this hope, because we find the Deists of late years consider the Subject of Revelation in a light more favourable to the Christian Cause than formerly : and seem to be sensible of the great advantage of a Revelation over Deism, provided it can be supported by proper and sufficient Evidence : as we may observe in the follow-

following quotation from Mr. Hume. He tells us, that Philosophical Devotion
 “ is the effect of high Spirits, great
 “ Leisure, a fine Genius, and a habit
 “ of Study and Contemplation; but
 “ notwithstanding *all* these Circum-
 “ stances, an abstracted invifible object,
 “ like that which *natural Religion alone*
 “ presents to us, cannot long actuate the
 “ mind, or be of moment in Life. To
 “ render the paffion of Continuance,
 “ we must find some method of affec-
 “ ting the Senses and Imagination; and
 “ must embrace some *Historical*, as well
 “ as some *Philosophical* accounts of the
 “ Divinity.” (Essay xxi.)

If this be fact, what must become of Mr. Tindal’s Christianity as old as the Creation? Lord Viscount Bolingbroke has very judiciously confidered the external proofs of Christianity, and reduced the question between the Christian and the Deift into a small compass; and no rational Christian will make any scruple to join issue with him upon it, as he has stated it: his words are these:

“ A Re-

“ A Religion founded on the au-
 “ thority of a divine Mission, confirmed
 “ by Prophecies and Miracles, appeals
 “ to Facts : and the Facts must be
 “ proved as all other Facts, that pass
 “ for authentic, are proved : for Faith
 “ so *reasonable after this proof*, is ab-
 “ surd before.” Letter V. p. 175.

The Deists, it must be owned, have of late puzzled the Cause very much, by not distinguishing a Miracle from an impossibility : just as Mr. Chubb confounded himself by not distinguishing between Suffering and Punishment. But one would imagine such a mistake would easily be set right if they would but reflect, that though the Miracles spoken of in scripture were impossible to be performed by men ; yet there is not the least appearance of Reason in supposing them impossible to be performed by those Beings to whom they are ascribed ; or that they were contrary to *their* Natures ; though they are so to *ours*. And all the Miracles which Christianity speaks of are nothing more than the interposition of such Beings.

Beings. And if this Fact can be proved, Lord Bolingbroke himself allows that the Belief of Christianity will appear to be reasonable.

Thus the rational Deists seem to be in a fair way of Conviction: if once the arguments are considered on both sides dispassionately. — On the other hand, how impossible it must be to convert a Deist to Christianity upon the Principles and Doctrines which are maintained in the View, will appear upon the Examination of *them* in the following Dialogue.

A D I A

A DIALOGUE, &c.

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A

D I A L O G U E

B E T W E E N

A Rational Christian and his Friend.

F. I HAVE called upon you thus early, my good Friend, on purpose to have some discourse with you upon a very serious and interesting Subject.

Ch. If my judgment or assistance of any kind can be of use to you, I am wholly at your service.

F. It is your judgment I am in want of. I have been just reading a Pamphlet entitled, a View of the Internal Evidence of the Christian Religion ; and if the account there given of Christianity is to be depended upon, it seems to be a heap of Inconsistency, without any support either from Reason or divine Attestation. The *miracles* and *prophecies*, upon which I always considered the truth of Christianity to be founded, are rendered wholly useless till the Religion is proved without them : the use of Reason, which I also depended upon, is rejected : The objections to Christianity are so unsatisfactorily answered, as rather to confirm the Deists in their Infidelity than to convert them : and in short the whole Edifice of Reveled Religion, as distinct from the Religion of Nature, is left without any support at all.

B

Ch.

Ch. Several of these reflections came into my mind as I was reading it ; for I have just run it over.

F. And yet the author seems to be in earnest ; to have a serious sense of Religion ; and to have changed his Principles of Deism for those of Christianity.

Ch. I can't tell what to think of it. I am frequently at a loss to know whether he is writing *for* Christianity or *against* it. He tells us, at the end of his book, of some, who if they *profess* to believe, deceive *others* ; and if they *fancy* that they believe, they deceive *themselves* (p. 182.) He may be an instance of his own observation, for what I know.

F. You seem then to think as I do, that his principles are dangerous.

Ch. I think them very much so. And that some men may be led by his authority to favour *Deism* ; for nothing worse can be said of Reveled Religion than that it is contrary to *nature, sense, and reason*. —Others, persuaded that God punishes the *innocent* instead of the *guilty*, may change *Deism* for *Demonism*. —Others, being led to believe that our Faculties may not be true, nor judge truly of what they distinctly and clearly perceive, may give themselves up entirely to *Scepticism*, and doubt of every thing. —Others who find it asserted that there are inconsistencies, or propositions contrary to Reason in the genuine doctrines of scripture ; and that Reason is not to judge of such matters ; may either wholly reject their *Reason*, and thereby lay themselves open to all kind of absurdity and superstition ; or else reject the *Scriptures*, and give up the whole of Revelation as indefensible. —For my own part, I am so fully satisfied, that Christianity is defensible by *Reason* and *Argument* ; and that God would never revele to reasonable Creatures any other than a *Rational* Religion ; that I think
who-

whoever attempts to defend it upon any other footing, must do the cause more harm than good.

F. It is for this Reason; as I am not so well versed in these matters as you are; I wish you would give me some information with regard to the particulars you disapprove of.

Ch. With all my heart. If you please we will will run over the whole book. Here take it into your hand, and be in the place of the Author, and add whatever arguments you please, which you may think necessary to defend the doctrines there maintained: and I will give you my objections. But you must excuse me, if the paroxysms of the Gout, with which you see I am laid up in flannel, should now and then make me a little peevish. However, I will endeavour to stick to Mr. Pope's rule as well as I am able—

Laugh where we *must*, be candid where we *can*;
But vindicate the ways of God to man.

F. It will please me much: as to your impatience, I shall only smile at it.—I shall begin then in the author's own words.

“ Most of the writers who have undertaken to
“ prove the divine original of the Christian Re-
“ ligion, have had recourse to arguments drawn
“ from these three heads; the *Prophecies* still
“ extant in the Old Testament; the *Miracles* re-
“ corded in the New, and the *internal Evidence*
“ arising from that excellence, and those clear
“ marks of supernatural interposition, which are
“ so conspicuous in the Religion itself.—The two
“ former have been sufficiently explained and en-
“ forced by the ablest pens; but the last, which
“ seems to carry with it the *greatest* degree of
“ conviction, has never, I think, been considered
“ with that attention it deserves.” (p. 1, 2.)

Ch. I can by no means agree with you, that *any* argument can carry with it so *strong* a degree of

conviction as an *attestation from God* himself by the accomplishment of prophecy and the performance of miracles.

F. I allow that the authority of Prophecy is *sufficiently* confirmed by its completion; and is therefore a *solid proof* of the supernatural Origin of a Religion, whose Truths it was intended to testify; p. 4. and miracles were convincing proofs to them that *saw* them: but must *now* depend for much of their credibility on the truth of that Religion, they were at first intended to support. p. 4, 5.—To prove therefore the Truth of the Christian Religion, we should begin by shewing the *internal marks* of Divinity which are stamped upon it: because on *this*, the credibility of *Prophecies* and Miracles in a great measure depends. p. 5.

Ch. Do you mean to impose on your Readers by what you now say, or have you undesignedly imposed upon yourself? Your argument runs thus. Because the credibility of *Miracles* must now depend much upon the credibility of the Revelation it was intended to support; therefore the credibility of *Prophecy* and Miracles depends upon the credibility of that Revelation.—How came *Prophecy* to be shuffled into the conclusion, when nothing was mentioned in the premises but only miracles? But I shall prove from your own confession, that neither the one, nor the other, has any such dependence.—And 1st. The completion of Prophecy (which you allow to be a *solid proof* of a supernatural Origin of a Religion) is a fact detached and single, which does not depend upon the truth or falsehood of any other. The credibility of the *Christian Prophecies* do not therefore depend upon the credibility of the *Christian Revelation*; but is prior to it, independent of it, and proves it.

F. But

F. But the Proof of *Miracles* must be of a very *different* Nature ; these are not facts which we *see performed*, but must depend upon *Testimony*.

Ch. I am coming to that subject. And in the first place I must observe, that the *divine attestation* to the truth of Christianity, which was vouchsafed to the later ages by the *completion of prophecy*, makes it *probable*, that a divine attestation to the *same* truth was vouchsafed to the age, in which the Revelation was first given. It is therefore *probable*, that *Miracles* were *then* performed ; they being the proper attestation, when the Revelation was first made.

F. This will only prove them to be probable, but not actually performed.

Ch. It is true. But if it should appear *probable* that these miracles were performed : the fact itself must be considered in the same light with other *probable Facts* : and be proved in the same manner ; and that is by the *Testimony* of honest men. And this fact may be proved by eye-witnesses, men who laid down their lives in support of the Evidence, &c. in short there never was a fact so well attested *. From all which it appears, that the truth of *Miracles* does not depend on the truth of *Revelation*, any more than *Prophecy* does ; but *they* also serve the use they were intended to serve, that is, to *prove* it.

F. I contend for the use of miracles as well as you ; and I argue :—If we have once reason to be convinced that this religion is derived from a supernatural Origin, *Prophecies* and *Miracles* will be so far from incredible ; that it will be highly probable, that a supernatural Revelation should be foretold and enforced by supernatural means. (p. 6.) But we should first begin with the internal Marks of Divinity, which are stamped upon it. (p. 5.)

* See this argument more fully drawn up in Ben. Mordecai's Letter VII. p. 170 to 177.

Cb. I entirely agree with you, that, in examining the truth of a Traditionary revelation, we must first consider the internal marks of it; i. e. whether it be worthy of God, and calculated for the good of man: for, as Mr. Chillingworth observes, “if the doctrine of Scripture was not as good and fit to come from God, as the miracles are great, by which it is confirmed; we should want one main pillar of our faith.”^a These marks therefore are requisites, *sine qua non*; without which the Revelation cannot be from God. But it by no means follows from hence, that every traditionary Revelation, that answers to this character, necessarily *must* come from God, but only that it *may* do so. And we can have no *farther proof* of its *divinity* by any *internal* mark. The absolute *certainty* of it, can be nothing less, than the *positive attestation* of God himself by miracles or prophecy. In any other kind of proof we are liable to be imposed upon.

A late writer upon the subject, after proving the Truth of Christianity from the divine authority of Prophecy and Miracles, has carried the internal evidence as far as I imagine it will bear. He argues, that the more the world improves in the knowledge of Truth, especially with regard to the nature and attributes of God, and the moral excellence of Man, beyond what was known in former days; the more they will find their sentiments agree with those writings; which seems a plain Proof to an *unprejudiced* mind, that no man or set of men in the world were capable of composing them, without a divine Revelation, &c. But this argument will not amount to any thing more than a *presumptive* Proof; or, as the writer mean’d, “a *wonderful confirmation* of the Evidence before used:” but it will be far from sufficient to

^a Relig. of Protest. c. 2,

overcome the objections of such as are *prejudiced* against the belief of Christianity.

F. But is it not reasonable to believe that a *supernatural* Revelation will be both foretold and enforced by supernatural means ? p. 6.

Ch. Most certainly, — but it is not in your power to prove Christianity to be a *supernatural* Revelation, by the *internal* marks of its Divinity. You may prove the moral precepts to be of divine Origin, by their agreement with our Reason, and considering God almighty as the *author* of that Reason (as you speak of instinct, in pa. 165.); but not that he has taught them to us by any *external* Revelation. On the other hand, if the divinity of the Revelation could be proved from the *internal* Evidence, it is not probable that any *supernatural* Evidence would be used. There was no necessity for miracles to discover to *Socrates* or *Cicero* what they collected from their own Reasoning. The words of Horace may, I think, be very justly applied here.

“ Nec Deus interfit, nisi dignus vindice nodus

“ Inciderit.” —

In short, what gives me a distaste for your scheme before-hand, is this; not that you would give all just authority to the *internal* Evidence, but that you reject the very arguments which were used by God himself in the Old Testament, and by Christ and his Apostles in the New; and thereby render the divine attestations upon which they built, entirely useless: as indeed you plainly declare them to be ^a. And yet, as I shall have frequent reason to remind you; there is no part of the mediatorial scheme, that can be proved to be true by any other means.

^a See p. 131.

F. To ascertain the true system and genuine doctrines of Christianity, and remove all the rubbish which artifice and ignorance have heaped upon it, and say what pure Christianity is, divested of all its ornaments, appendages, and corruption, I shall not undertake (p. 6, 7.)

Ch. Why then do you undertake to prove the truth of Christianity from the *internal* Evidence, if you do not know what that *genuine* Christianity is, from the *Excellency* of which you suppose the *internal* Evidence to arise.

F. I only mean to shew that it cannot be derived from human wisdom, or human imposture (p. 7.)

Ch. I do not well apprehend *what* it is, that *cannot* be derived from human wisdom or human imposture; whether it be the *morality* of the New Testament, or the *mediatorial* scheme, or *both together*, or Christianity *with all the rubbish* as you express it, which you will not undertake to remove: and till you think proper to inform us in these particulars, it cannot appear what you mean by Christianity, nor upon what ground it is to be believed;—But I hope you will satisfy us in the course of your argument, both *what* it is that is of *divine origin*; and by *what marks* you judge it to be so.

F. What I undertake to prove is this only, that Christianity cannot be derived, but from a *divine* origin; and this I shall shew by stating and explaining the following plain and undeniable Propositions.

Ist. That there is now extant a book entitled the New Testament.

IId. That from this book may be extracted a System of Religion entirely new, both with regard to the object and the doctrines, not only infinitely *superior to*, but *unlike* every thing which had ever before entered into the mind of man.

IIIId.

III^d. That from this book may likewise be collected a System of Ethics, in which every moral precept founded on Reason is carried to a higher degree of purity and perfection than in any other of the wisest philosophers of preceding ages; every moral precept founded on false principles is totally omitted, and many new precepts added, peculiarly corresponding with the new object of this Religion.

Lastly, That such a System of Religion and Morality could not possibly have been the work of any man or set of men, much less of those obscure ignorant and illiterate persons who actually did discover and publish it to the world; and that therefore it must undoubtedly have been effected by the interposition of *divine* Power; that is, must derive its origin from God. (p. 8, 9.)

1st P R O P O S I T I O N.

F. I suppose you will allow, that there is now a book extant, entitled, the New Testament. (p. 11.)

Ch. Most assuredly I do.

F. You allow that this book contains four historical accounts of the birth, life, &c. of Jesus Christ, also one account of the travels of the Apostles, with several Epistolary writings. p. 12.

Ch. I allow all this, and moreover, that there is a book among them of a different nature from all these, which is of as *much* authority as *any* of them, and contains such prophecies, as, when accomplished, will exhibit a stronger evidence of Christianity, than has appeared in the world since the days of the Apostles.—But proceed in your argument.—I allow there is such a book.

II^d P R O P O S I T I O N.

F. My second proposition is not quite so simple; that from this book may be extracted a System of Religion *entirely new*, both with regard to the
object

object and the *doctrines*; not only infinitely superior to, but *totally unlike* every thing, which had ever before entered into the mind of man. (p. 17.)

And this Proposition I shall go on to prove from considering, 1st, The Object of Christianity, and 2dly, The Doctrines.

“ And 1st, The *Object* of this Religion is *entirely new*, and is this, to prepare us by a State of Probation for the Kingdom of Heaven; this is every where professed by Christ and his Apostles, to be the chief end of the Christian’s life; the crown for which he is to contend; the goal to which he is to run; the harvest which is to pay him for all his labours: yet *previous* to *their preaching*, no *such Prize* was ever hung out to mankind, nor any means prescribed for the attaining of it.” (p. 20.)

Ch. If you will consult the writings of Cicero, or the words of Socrates^a, who both died before the Christian Revelation was given, you will find yourself mistaken. I shall quote what *Cicero* says upon this subject, from his *Somnium Scipionis*, where he speaks in the Person of *Scipio*, as follows. “ In order to encourage you, my dear
“ *Africanus*, to defend the state with the greater
“ chearfulness, be assured, that for all those who
“ have any ways conduced to the preservation,
“ defence, or enlargement of their native country,
“ there is a certain place in *Heaven*, where they
“ shall enjoy an eternity of happiness^b. Again,
“ follow the examples of your grandfather here,
“ and of me your father, in paying a strict regard
“ to *Justice* and *Piety*, the influence of which to-

^a Plato’s *Phæd.* c. xli. ^b For the sake of my unlearned Readers, I quote the words of Cicero from a little book published by the Abbé d’Olivet in Latin and French, and now published in Latin, French, and English, entitled, *Thoughts of Cicero*. Sold by Newberry and Carnan in St. Paul’s Church-yard, See p. 275.

“wards parents and relations is great indeed, but
 “towards our country greatest of all. Such a
 “life as this, is the true way to *Heaven*, and to
 “the company of those, who after having lived
 “on earth and been disunited from the body, in-
 “habit the place you now behold^a. And again,
 “had you no hopes of returning to *this place*,
 “where great and good men enjoy all that their
 “souls could wish; of what, I pray, would be
 “the signification of all human glory, which can
 “hardly endure for the small portion of one
 “year?”

Here we see that the *prize of Heaven* was expressly hung out *before* Christianity, and the means for attaining it: The whole of Scipio's dream is founded upon that belief.—The words of *Socrates* to the same purpose, I shall quote a little further on.

F. I say the notions, which the Philosophers of antiquity entertained of a future state were mixed with much *doubt* and *uncertainty*.

Ch. If we reject the evidence of Prophecy and Miracles in proof of Christianity, we are no more certain of a future state than *they* were: for as eternal life is the FREE GIFT of God, and not a *Debt of Justice*, it is no otherwise to be proved, than by a Revelation of the divine Will. If the doctrine had carried in itself the mark of Divinity, it would have been as certain to *Cicero*, as it is to us.—But be that as it may; it cannot possibly be a *new* doctrine; if it be true, as you confess, that the belief of it was infused into the minds of the heathens *before* Christ, by their Legillators. (p. 21.)

F. By this they only intended to give a Sanction to their Laws, and to enforce the practice of Virtue for the benefit of mankind in the present life.

^a Ibid. 279.

Ch. I hope you will not maintain that this prize was *never* hung out before, because it was hung out to *enforce* the practice of Virtue for the benefit of mankind: we are considering the *fact itself*, not the *reason* of it.

F. Christianity not only operates more effectually to this end; but it has a nobler design in view; and that is, by a proper education to render us fit members of a celestial Society.

Ch. The question is not, how the doctrine *operated*, but whether it was ever *maintained* before Christianity.—But did not the practice of Virtue, upon the hopes of future happiness, which was hung out by the Heathen Legislators, fit men to be members of a heavenly Society?

F. There is a great difference, as I apprehend, between these two plans. The one is adhering to Virtue from its *present utility* (the benefit of mankind) in expectation of future happiness; the other is the living in such a manner as to *qualify* us for the acceptance and enjoyment of it. (p. 22.)

Ch. There is without doubt a difference between adhering to Virtue in hopes of future happiness, and adhering to Virtue in order to qualify for the acceptance and enjoyment of it. But Christianity declares, without any such nice distinctions, that he who doeth righteousness is righteous even as he [the Son of God] is Righteous. 1 Jo. iii. 7. ii. 29.—Besides, it is very certain that the Heathens, particularly the Stoicks, carried the notion of *preparing* for future happiness by *purifying* the mind, to a very great height; and called it reverencing the *divinity* within them: for they considered the Soul as a *part* of God^a: and accordingly a main part of their Religion consisted in

^a Thoughts of Cic. 263. 299. Tuf. 1.—Particulam quandam Dei, eandemq; immortalem animam esse prædicant Stoici Epiph. Hæc. v. p. 12.

the government of their passions, that the *divine particle* might not be defiled; but the body be kept in subservience to the mind. This was the meaning of the maxim, that, Virtue is its own reward; by which they meant, that the pains we should exert in subduing our passions, were fully paid by the serenity and happiness which it brought to the mind; for they esteemed its happiness to consist in a consciousness of its own Virtue. Hence came such expressions as we meet in *Horace*,

“ *Mens conscia recti—Hic murus abeneus esto,*

“ *Nil conscire sibi, nulla pallescere culpa.*”

This was the *verum* atque *decens* he speaks of, in his Epistle to *Mæcenæ*, where he recommends the Stoick Philosophy as a Remedy against the Love of Fame, Avarice, Envy, Anger, Sloth, Drunkenness, and Lust, and equally useful to the old and young, the rich and poor; *æque pauperibus*, &c. And Cicero says expressly, “ Let your Souls, which are immortal, exercise themselves upon the noblest Subjects; and being so employed, they will fly with the greater swiftness into that place which is their proper home and abode.”

And *Socrates*, in *Plato's Phædon*, says, “ if the soul is immortal, we ought to take great care of it, not only during this time, which we call *life*, but for ever: and there can be no way of safety, or avoiding evil, but by being as good and wise as possible,” cap. xli. And again, “ If the soul retains its purity, it departs to a divinity (*το θεον*) like itself, a divinity immortal and wise: [In the former part of the chapter, he says, “ to a good and wise God (*θεοι*), to whom, if it please God, my Soul will presently depart,” cap. xxi.] where it becomes happy, free from Error, Ignorance, and all other human Evils, and, as we say

“ say of the initiated, passes the rest of his time
 “ with the Gods.”

Again, “ He that passeth his life in purity and
 “ temperance has the Gods for his Companions
 “ and Leaders, and dwelleth in whatever mansions
 “ are most agreeable to him.” (cap. xli.)

F. But Christianity insists more strongly than
 any preceding institution, religious or moral, on
 purity of heart and a benevolent disposition (p. 23).

Ch. With regard to Purity of heart, I shall add
 here what we are told by Cicero, “ that to wor-
 “ ship the Gods is our indispensable duty, and *that*
 “ *worship* is best performed, most pure and perfect,
 “ when it is offered with true *sincerity* and *purity*
 “ of mind. Without Piety, neither Sanctity of
 “ manners, nor Religion, can in any wise be sup-
 “ ported: and if these are destroyed, what dread-
 “ ful confusion and disorder must ensue! Indeed
 “ it is a question with me, whether without *Piety*
 “ towards the Gods, the natural Confidence and
 “ Society of mankind, or that most excellent of
 “ all virtues Justice could subsist^a.” Here you see
 that Sincerity and Purity of heart is the funda-
 mental Principle of all our Virtues.—As to the
 Virtue of *Benevolence*, I shall give you the maxims
 of the Stoicks, as they are collected by Gataker.
 “ Mankind we ought from our heart to love, to
 “ have a tender care of, to bear with their weak-
 “ ness, to abstain from all kind of injury, that
 “ being impiety; to do them all the good we can,
 “ to let all behold us dedicate ourselves to the
 “ utmost of our strength and ability for the pub-
 “ lick good, and be kindly beneficent to all,
 “ deeming it our own good that we have done
 “ good to others^b.”

F. But Christianity requires Faith, Resignation,
 and a Contempt of the World.

^a Thoughts of Cic.

^b Gataker's Antoninus, in Prælog.

Ch. Most certainly : but were not all these looked upon to be duties by the Heathen Moralists ? Let us hear what Cicero says of *Faith* :
 “ We can entertain no other Idea of God, so far
 “ as his nature is comprehensible by us, than that
 “ of a pure and free Intelligence or Spirit (*mentem*),
 “ entirely distinct from all corruptible matter,
 “ perceiving and moving all things, and possessed
 “ of self-motion from Eternity^a; an excellent,
 “ perfect, and eternal Being, worthy of the most
 “ exalted respect and admiration of mankind.
 “ That the Gods *observe* our actions, whether good
 “ or bad ; *discern* whether our professions of Re-
 “ ligion are sincere and from the heart, and are
 “ sure *to make a difference between the good and*
 “ *the wicked*^b.” And what is this, but the very
 definition of faith which is given us by St. Paul^c ?
 “ But without faith it is impossible to please God,
 “ for he that cometh unto God must believe that
 “ he is, and that he is the *Rewarder* of them that
 “ diligently seek him^c.” I hope you are not so
 unreasonable, as to imagine, that God expects to
 reap where he has not sown, and looks for Faith
 in *Christ*, among those who never heard of him.

The next Virtue you speak of as peculiar to Christianity is *Resignation*; upon which I shall again direct you to the maxims of the Stoicks :
 “ The divine providence takes care of human af-
 “ fairs, and not of the universe only in general,
 “ but of each single man and each single matter :
 “ is present in all the affairs of men, and aids
 “ mankind not only in those things, which are
 “ their true good and happiness ; but in the ex-
 “ ternal conveniences and supports of Life. God
 “ is therefore above all to be worshiped, in all
 “ undertakings to be invoked, at all times to be

^a Thoughts, 31.

^b Pa. 35, Thoughts of Cic.

^c Heb. xi. 6.

“ remembered and present to our thoughts; in
 “ all things to be acknowledged, and his conduct
 “ approved; for all things to be praised and ce-
 “ lebrated. To him alone we ought in singleness
 “ of heart to yield a willing obedience in all we
 “ do. From him whatever comes to us, we ought
 “ to receive and embrace with a ready and hearty
 “ accord; and think nothing better, nothing more
 “ convenient, more advantageous, more fortunate,
 “ or more seasonable, than *that*, whatever it be,
 “ that he hath willed. Wherever he thinks fit
 “ to lead us we ought to follow, without mur-
 “ muring or turning back. Whatever place or
 “ station he has assigned to us, that we ought
 “ strenuously to keep, and with all our might
 “ maintain, were we even by that to meet a thou-
 “ sand deaths ^a.”—And we shall hardly find a
 greater mark of *Resignation*, than in the *prayer* of
Socrates, “ That the Gods would give to him
 “ those things which are good, leaving the rest to
 “ them as knowing what was good for man better
 “ than he did ^b.” And the Lacedæmonians prayed
 only in general for καλὰ ἐπὶ τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς, things decent
 and good ^c.

The last virtue you mention as peculiar to Chris-
 tianity is a *Contempt of the World*. Upon which
 I shall once more direct you to Cicero: “ What
 “ can be conceived more truly happy, than the
 “ state of that man, who, having attained to an
 “ exact knowledge of Virtue, throws off all in-
 “ dulgence to *body* and *sense*; tramples upon *plea-*
 “ *sure*, as a thing unbecoming the dignity of his
 “ nature; is not terrified at the approach of *af-*
 “ *liction*, or even *Death* itself. When he shall
 “ have attained in a great measure the know-
 “ ledge of that *Being*, who superintends and go-

^a From Gataker's Antoninus in Prælog.

^b Xenoph. Mem. of Socrates, ch. iii.

^c Plato's second Alcibiades.

“ verns the heavens, earth, and seas, and shall
 “ look upon himself not as *confined* within the
 “ walls of one City, or as the member of any *par-*
 “ *ticular community*; but as a *Citizen of the Uni-*
 “ *verse* considered as one State. Upon such a
 “ grand representation of things as this—how *low*
 “ would he esteem, how thoroughly would he
 “ *contemn* and *despise* those things, which by vul-
 “ gar minds are held in the highest estima-
 “ tion ^a.”

Do you still imagine that these principles were unknown before Christianity? Is not this the highest Contempt of the World, and founded on the most just principle of *Faith* and *Resignation* to the *Divine Will*?

F. That the present life is a State of Probation and Education to prepare us for another (which preparation for another is the object of this Revelation, and the principle on which it is founded), is confirmed by every thing which we see around us: It is the *only* Key which can open to us the designs of Providence in the oeconomy of human affairs (p. 24), and on this system *all* that we here meet with may be *easily accounted* for.

Ch. It is very true; but neither new, nor consistent with your notion “ that the doctrines of
 “ Christianity contain Ideas of God and Man, of
 “ the present and future life, and the relations
 “ these bear to one another were totally unheard
 “ of, and *quite dissimilar from any thing, which had*
 “ *ever been thought of previous to its publication,*”
 (p. 26.) For one can never imagine the way to improve the world in Piety, Justice, Temperance, and every other moral duty (and nothing can be called improvement in comparison with these),

^a Thoughts on Cic. p. 45.

would be brought about, by introducing a set of *new* doctrines, totally *unlike* every thing they knew before; but by giving them *clearer notions* of their *duties*, and *stronger motives* to *perform* them. It seems as absurd to talk of improving our morals by any other means, as of improving us in the languages, by teaching us ship-building or agriculture.

F. I aver that no Religion ever drew so just a Portrait of the worthlessness of this world and all its pursuits, nor exhibited such distinct lively and exquisite pictures of the Joys of another Life, of the Resurrection of the dead, &c. (p. 27.)

Ch. If the portrait drawn by the heathens is only less justly drawn, the two Portraits cannot be entirely dissimilar. The improvement made in painting, though ever so great, will not be a medium to prove that the art was never heard of before the improvement was made, but the direct contrary. St. Jerom tells us, that the maxims of Christianity, and those of the Stoicks had a very great resemblance: and the reason seems to be, because they allowed that nothing was good, but what was pious, just, humane, and honourable; and that a good man is happy, whatever be his condition in this world; which notion seems to agree with our Saviour's sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are they that are persecuted for Righteousness sake; blessed are ye when men shall revile you," &c.

F. No other Religion hath ever represented the Supreme Being in the character of three Persons united in one Substance (p. 27), or declared that God is sometimes three Beings, and sometimes only one. (27—160.)

Ch. And where do you find any such doctrine, that you give it as a proof of the divine origin of Christianity?

F. The

F. The whole tenor of the New Testament seems to express some such union in the Divine Nature.

Ch. That the Scripture speaks of three different Persons or Beings, each of them promoting the gracious design of our Redemption, is most certain. And that there is the same union between the Father and the Son in this respect, as our Saviour prays for between his disciples, that they might be *one* in the *same manner* as the Father and he are one, is very plain from our Saviour's words ^a; as also from the following words, "I am in the Father, and you in me, and I in you ^b." But I know no reason why we should expect any other kind of union than this one between the three Beings.—What you mean by saying they are united in one God, I can no more understand than if you said they were united in one holy Ghost:—nor what you mean by *some* such Union, as if there were many Unions of the same kind: nor what you mean by a Union *in* the divine Nature.—The Scripture knows of no such language.—The Dean of Gloucester tells us, in like manner, "There is a Trinity of co-equal Persons in the undivided Essence of the Godhead; and this is *explicitly* declared in several passages of Scripture." But there is not *one* such passage to be found there; nor any such words as he makes use of: nor even any such an *implicit* declaration.

F. It was so understood, as I have expressed it, in the earliest ages.

Ch. I believe no man before yourself ever understood it as you do. However, if you know how it was understood, I should be glad to hear (particularly for the sake of the Church of England, which is much divided upon the question), whether they understood by three Persons three

^a Jo. xvii. 28.

^b Ibid. xiv. 18.

different Beings (substantial Beings); or only three different Characters (or abstract Ideas, or Relations); because, if they understood three different Substances or Beings, all equal and supreme, they understood three different and distinct Gods. And, if they only understood three Characters, they must believe that it was only a Character that suffered for mankind, was conceived by the holy Ghost, and born of the Virgin Mary ^a.

F. I don't pretend to say, whether this Union does or does not imply an equality, or whether it subsists in general, or only in particular circumstances (p. 28).

Ch. If that be your doubt, you begin a new Heresy of your own, and desert the orthodoxy of all ages.—Even the Homoeousians imagined the Trinity to be undivided, and to be always one God and three Persons, though they would not explain what they mean'd by Persons: and accordingly they defended their opinion by the Text in Eccles. iv. 12. “a threefold Cord is not quickly broken:” but they never supposed the *Unity* of God to depend upon *Circumstances*, and that he was *sometimes three Beings* and *sometimes one*.—What a notion you must have of the immutability of God!

F. I do not think these questions are either necessary or proper for us to decide (p. 28).

Ch. But St. Paul hath decided the most material one long ago; for he tells us, that there is one God and Father of all, who is above all ^b. Is the Son, or is the holy Ghost, this one God and Father of all, who is above all? or is there any other Person in the universe, who answers to this character?—You may as well tell us it is improper to decide, whether there is any supreme Governor of the Universe at all, as whether there is more than one. You should not introduce such subjects, if

^a Mord. Let. vii. 148, &c.

^b Eph. iv. 6.

we are not to decide upon them agreeably to whatever light we find. To object to this, is to talk as the Papists do about Transubstantiation.—If by laying together, and comparing what we see and know (let the subject be what it will), any truth will arise which we did not know before, it is certainly so much gain; and if upon doing this we find *no* other truth results from it, where is the loss?—If we do not reason upon the *Existence* and *Natural* Attributes of God, we give up the argument to the *atheist*; and if we do not reason upon his *moral* attributes, we have no foundation for *any* Religion, either natural or revealed.

F. No other [Religion] before Christianity ever attempted to reconcile the Contingency of future events with the foreknowledge of God (p. 28).

Ch. And where have you found the solution of this difficulty in Scripture? That God does fore-know future Events is certain; but I never met with a text that offered to explain how his foreknowledge was consistent with our free will.

F. No other ever attempted to shew how the Free will of the Creature was consistent with the over-ruling Grace of the Creator (p. 28).

Ch. I can see no difficulty in it, except you suppose the will of the Creature to be free, at the same time that it is over-ruled; which is a contradiction in terms. But the Scripture never solves these questions, nor supposes these difficulties. They are all of our own making.

F. No other has so fully declared the necessity of wickedness and punishment; and yet so effectually instructed Individuals, to resist the one and escape the other (p. 28).

Ch. If you mean that there is a necessity for that wickedness, which we are *effectually* instructed to *escape*, it is a contradiction. For either the wickedness is *not* necessary, or else we cannot be *effectually* instructed to *escape* it. And besides, if the

wickedness be necessary, the Punishment must be not only *unnecessary*, but *unjust*; for no one can be justly punished for what it is not in his power to prevent.

F. No other man has ever pretended to give an account of the depravity of man, or pointed out any remedy for it (p. 29).

Ch. I imagine none of the heathen moralists were insensible of the imperfect (*i. e.* the frail) nature of man. And I know of no actual depravity of Nature but what has arisen from ourselves; for in whatever manner we account for the first sin, before our nature is supposed to be depraved, we may account for all that have been committed since. "The souls of most men, Cicero says, carry about them some alloy, something naturally mean, languid, and enervate; and did this constitute the whole of our nature, man would be the most despicable creature in the world: But he has likewise Reason, the Mistress, the Queen of all his other Powers; which by her natural force still makes advances and improvement, till she arrives at perfect Virtue, or a conformity to right Reason^a." And what is this but a Remedy against our imperfections?—We are told indeed that there is in human nature a great Propension to vice: but what is mean'd by this, except merely a propension to indulge those passions, which God has implanted in us for wise and good purposes? There is no sin in the propension, nor in the indulgence, but only in the excess. Every Virtue not govern'd by Reason, degenerates into Vice.—But let it be fairly examined, whether there is not a greater propension to Virtue: whether any man becomes greatly wicked without many struggles, or committed his first sins without regret at

^a Thoughts of Cic. 105. Ipsa virtus brevissime recta Ratio dici potest. Cic. Tusc. iv. 15.

the time, and remorse afterwards.—On the contrary, every virtuous action appears congenial to his nature: it is attended with unalloy'd pleasure at the time, and unalloy'd pleasure in the Recollection. And whence come these sensations, but *from the ruling principle in our nature?* and our *sin consists in nothing else* but in acting contrary to *this ruling principle*; and it is impossible that it should be *agreeable* to our nature to act contrary to the *ruling principle* of our nature. However, the word Nature, when we use it as relative to *all* men in respect to their moral characters, is a vague Term. What one man calls a *natural* vice, another looks upon as *unnatural*: “To hurt any one for one’s own benefit, says Cicero, is more contrary to nature, than pain, than poverty, than death:” yet others may think it so natural, that an external Revelation is necessary to prove it wrong. Every man therefore must judge of his own *nature* by his own *feelings*; and no man can answer for another man’s nature. For, as Bishop Fowler asks, where shall we find *universal human nature*, except in the finest head-pieces of metaphysicians^a? However, if that word includes our passions, it must likewise include our understanding; and to lay our sins upon Nature, seems to be the same thing as if we laid them upon God himself, from whom we received our nature. But we may rest assured, that no man will be called to answer for any depravity, which cannot justly be imputed to himself.

F. No other hath ventured to declare the *unpardonable* nature of sin, without the influence of a mediatorial interposition, and a *vicarious atonement* by the sufferings of a superior Being^b (p. 29).

Ch. The Scripture declares no such thing. It informs us, in the Old Testament, that God par-

^a B. Mord. Lett. i. p. 62.

^b Ibid. Lett. vi.

dons penitent finners for his own sake, and in the New, that he pardons by or through a Mediator; but it never says, that he could not have done it for his *own sake* at all times. Nor does it ever speak of sin, as a thing that is unpardonable without a *vicarious atonement*^a: this is all an invention of men, and a relict of Paganism; and was probably brought into Christianity by the heathen Philosophers of the Alexandrian school, who had been used to such atonements before their conversion to Christianity^b.

F. That Christ suffered and died as an atonement for the sins of mankind, is a doctrine strongly and constantly enforced through every part of the New Testament (p. 29).

Cb. But why do you perversely understand an *atonement* to mean the punishment of an innocent person instead of the guilty? (a doctrine absolutely inconsistent with every notion of divine Justice, as you yourself confess (p. 159), when it may and must be understood in the Jewish Law to be made sometimes without any death at all, by water or oil, or an offering of flour^c. In short, whatever puts away enmity between two persons, though the enmity be only on one side, is in the scriptural language an *atonement*, as it causes a Reconciliation. And when Christ declared the Love of God to Man, in offering a FREE Pardon^d of sin to all, who would enter into his kingdom and obey his Laws, and the gift of eternal Life to his sincere subjects; it was the *Knowledge* of this *Love* of God to Mankind, manifested by the *death of Christ* for our sakes, which put an end to that enmity and suspicion of his good will, which had always before prevailed in the heathen World, and brought them over and reconciled them to God.—But this is never repre-

^a Ibid. Let. v. p. 26.

^c Ibid. 114.

^b Ibid. Lett. vii. p. 110.

^d Ibid. vi. 51.

sented in Scripture to be a *vicarious* punishment of Christ; nor could it be so if men were forgiven **FREELY**, as St. Paul declares ^a: Nor is it ever said in Scripture, that Christ was *punished*. Besides, God did not reconcile *himself* to *us*, but reconciled *us* to *himself*; and accordingly the Apostle says, “ Now then we are ambassadors for Christ; as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God ^b.”

It is therefore never said in Scripture, either that God was reconciled to man, or that Christ reconciled God to man, for God was never at enmity with man ^c; but, even when they were sinners, “ God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, to the end that all who believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” The Scripture therefore founds our Redemption upon the Love of God, granting a **FREE** pardon, whereas you found it upon the Resentment of God, demanding the punishment of the innocent person instead of the guilty; and which of these appears to be a conduct most agreeable to the nature of a just and good God?

F. But was not this a mediatorial Interposition?

Ch. That is the very thing I say; God made his Son the only mediator between God and man, and gave him the Power to forgive Sin **FREELY**, and made him a Prince and a Saviour in reward of his obedience to death. But his death was no *vicarious* Punishment, nor any *Punishment* at all; but was voluntarily undertaken, upon the prospect of the reward which was set before him; the prospect of gaining a power to confer a happy Eternity upon Millions. Whereas Punishment is absolutely inconsistent with any *Reward* or *Recompence* in view. However, I observe, that in the note, where

^a Rom. iii. 24.

^b 2 Cor. v. 20.

^c Letter vi. 53.

you are so sanguine in defence of the word *atone-ment*, you have omitted the word *vicarious*: and indeed there is no such word in Scripture, nor were the Jewish Sacrifices of that nature^a.

F. But is not the Punishment of Vice a debt due to Justice? (p. 112.)

Ch. I suppose you mean, that the suffering punishment, is the payment of a *debt due to God*. But do you think the payment of this debt so absolutely necessary, that it is not in the power of God to forgive it, whenever it may serve the cause of Righteousness more effectually, than the exacting the payment of the debt?

F. There can be no Forgiveness without a Compensation. (p. 112.)

Ch. I should rather think there can be no Forgiveness so far as the Compensation reaches; because *so far*, the debt is already *paid*;—and besides, there were many sins forgiven by Christ, *before* the supposed Compensation was made; i. e. As *soon* as he took the Character of the Son of Man.

F. Do not the Christian Divines consider our sins as a debt, which Christ has already paid for us?

Ch. They do; but the New Testament never does so: However, supposing it true; who is to pay the debt to Christ? for according to this notion, the debt is only transferred from the Father to the Son, and the difficulty still remains: For can we suppose, that the Son would forgive that debt without a compensation, which the Father would not; and exalt the mercy of the Son at the expence of the Father? God forbid!—An Hypothesis must labour violently, that is involved in such Blasphemy.

F. But if the vice is not punished, how can the debt be cancelled at all? You will not say that Re-

^a Ben. Mord. Let. vii.

pentance can do it. If any by profligacy or extravagance should contract a debt, can Repentance cancel the bonds? He must be ever accountable; unless they are discharged by himself or some other,—and this discharge Christianity holds out upon our Repentance. (p. 112.)

Ch. How can you tell us in the same breath, that Repentance will not discharge the same debt; and that Christianity holds out a discharge of it upon Repentance? But suppose the creditor should have a great kindness for the debtor; and in hopes he might take up and amend his conduct, should actually forgive him the debt FREELY. Is not this a more probable supposition, than that he should think of requiring the payment of a debt by a person who did not owe it; and does not *St. Paul* declare this to be the case, as planely as words can express it? *Rom. iii. 24.*

F. These doctrines are so far removed from every tract of human imagination, that it seems equally impossible that they should be derived from the knowledge or artifice of men. (p. 30.)

Ch. I have answered this impious argument in another place ^a, where you are more explicit.

F. Some indeed there are, who, by perverting the established signification of words, which they call explaining, have ventured to expunge all these doctrines; for no other reason than because they are not able to comprehend them. (p. 31.)

Ch. I know of no Christians who expunge any of the New Testament doctrines, for this, or any other reason. I am well aware, that the Romanists may accuse the Protestants of so doing, because we deny that the words, *this is my body*, are to be taken literally. But surely you will not allow the accusation to be just.—The Protestants argue, that these words ought to be explained consistent with other texts, and with that Reason which must

^a 136. Answer to p. 165.

be our guide in the interpretation of scripture through the whole; otherwise we must believe, that Christ is literally a material *vine*, a *door*, &c.

F. But the Christians I speak of, argue thus.

The Scriptures are the word of God.

In his word no contradictory Propositions can have a place.

These Propositions are contrary to reason, and therefore are not there. (p. 31.)

Ch. If these Christians conclude, that no Proposition contrary to Reason can be reveled by God, or that God always acts agreeable to Reason, they argue justly. — And, for the same Reason, if a proposition *appears* to be contrary to Reason, they must conclude, that God Almighty did not mean that it should be understood in *that sense*; and every Protestant must argue in the same manner, viz.

The Scriptures are the word of God.

In his word no contradictory Proposition, or no Proposition contrary to Reason can have a place.

Therefore the words, *this is my body*, are not to be understood in the literal sense, but in a sense agreeable to Reason. And the Romish Church in other Texts must argue in the very same manner, or else believe that Christ was a material *vine* and *door*.

F. But if these bold asserters would clame any regard, they would reverse the argument thus.

These doctrines (which are contradictory to Reason) make a part, and a material part, of the Scriptures.

No propositions contradictory to Reason can be a part of the word of God.

Therefore neither the Scriptures, nor the pretended Revelations contained in them, can be derived from him.

This

This would be an argument worthy of rational and candid Deists, and demand a respectful attention.

Ch. Without doubt; and it ought to be answered by every man who undertakes to defend Christianity; but it is not in your power to answer it, without giving up your whole system: for it is impossible that Christianity should be proved credible by any evidence whatever, if it be allowed to contain such doctrines as are contrary to reason: for where is the difference between seeing a thing to be contrary to reason, and seeing it to be incredible? How can Reason lead a person to believe a doctrine that is contradictory to Reason?

F. Let me hear then what answer you would make to this syllogism.

Ch. I would absolutely deny that there is any one doctrine in the Scripture, which is contrary to reason. I would add *ex abundanti*, that if any such had appeared planely and undeniably, when I first examined into the Internal Evidence of it; I should never have received it as a divine Revelation.

I would allow that no doctrine contrary to Reason can be a part of the word of God.

And then let the Deist get on to his conclusion as well as he can.—I deny the major, and let the Deist prove it.

Tindal, in his Christianity as old as the Creation, has handled this subject very judiciously, ch. xii. p. 179.

“To suppose any thing in Revelation inconsistent with Reason, and at the same Time pretend it to be the will of God, is not only to destroy that proof, on which we conclude it to be the will of God, but even the proof of the being of a God: since if our reasoning faculty, duly attended to, can deceive us; we cannot be sure of the truth of any one proposition: but every thing would be
alike

alike uncertain, and we should for ever fluctuate in a state of universal scepticism;—but as long as Reason is against men, men will be against Reason; we must not therefore be surprized, to see some endeavour to reason men out of their Reason: though the very attempt to destroy Reason by Reason, is a Demonstration that men have nothing but Reason to trust to.” For, I shall add, even Revelation must be interpreted by Reason, or will be full of inconsistencies. It is not the words, but the sense, that we are to attend to.

F. When men pretend to disprove facts by reasoning, they have no right to expect an answer.

Ch. When men call their own fanciful interpretations Facts, and expect them to be believed without examination; and accuse those who differ from them of perverting the established signification of words, they affect an authority which they have no right to: and which all true Protestants disclame.

F. I cannot omit observing here, that the personal character of the author of this Religion is no less new and extraordinary than the Religion itself. (p. 32.)

Ch. No Christian can doubt of it. He was prophesied of long before-hand, and the very time of his mission foretold. He was born in a miraculous manner; performed the most extraordinary miracles; and after death, God Almighty gave assurance unto all men, that he would judge the world in Righteousness by him, in that he raised him from the dead ^a.

F. I do not mean to alledge these miracles, because they will have but little effect upon the minds of Unbelievers, who if they believe not the Religion, will give no credit to the Facts.

^a Acts xvii. 31.

Ch. I have already shewn, that the accomplishment of prophecies, and the performance of miracles, may be proved, prior to the belief of Revelation, and will support the truth of it; and to this purpose they were used by Christ and his Apostles. Was not this the attestation which God gave to his Son; and was not his Resurrection the grand article on which the apostles rested the whole of their credit; without which they confess their Faith to be vain, and our hopes vain^a? How came they not to argue as you do, that there were sufficient marks of the divinity of the Gospel in the doctrines themselves which they taught? The men they preached to, were many of them no more capable of seeing the miracle of the Resurrection, than we are. Yet this was the main point insisted on.—Do but consider in what an extraordinary manner you reason. Here is a Religion said to be reveled from Heaven, agreeable to reason (though even *that* you deny in some particulars) and calculated to promote the good of mankind; the credibility of which is in question. God Almighty attests to the truth of it by miracles and prophecy; and you tell us, nobody will believe the attestations till they believe the Religion. Can any thing appear more perverse? does not God Almighty refer to such attestations in the Old Testament, and Christ himself in the New? And have not you yourself confessed, that the accomplishment of prophecy is a solid proof of the supernatural Revelation of a Religion, whose truth it was intended to testify; and that the present State of the Jews is a continual miracle? p. 2.

F. But I will prove the truth of Christianity by Facts which cannot be disputed.

Ch. Any thing may be disputed. But I cannot see any reason for chusing to build upon the sand

^a 1 Cor. xv. 14.

rather than upon a rock ; except you mean to undermine the cause you have undertaken to support.

F. I say that Christ is the only Founder of a Religion in the history of mankind, which is totally unconnected with human Policy ; that he did not aim at power or riches ; that he made his own sufferings and death a part of his mission : add to this the divine lessons, the perfect precepts, the beautiful discourses, the consistent conduct of this wonderful Person. If we consider these things, we cannot possibly imagine, that he could either have been an Ideot or a madman : and yet, if he was not what he pretended to be, he can be considered in no other light. (p. 35.)

Ch. It is but a disagreeable task to call in question the validity of any argument which may be made use of to prove our Saviour's divine mission. And yet, on the other hand, we must distinguish such kind of presumptive evidence, as only proves the *possibility* or *probability* of it, from such *direct* proof as fully and undeniably ascertains the *Fact*. For plausible arguments in this case will signify nothing. The proof we want must be *absolute* and of such a nature, as it is not in the power of any other, but a person sent from heaven to produce : For I cannot conceive that any *plausible* or *presumptive* proof which is within the power of man to invent and practise, may not be as well used in support of *imposture*, as *truth* ; and must therefore own, I know of no argument which will amount to a *direct* proof in favour of Christ, and a Reprobation of all the *pseudomessiahs*, except only the *accomplishments of prophecy*, and the *performance of Miracles* : these being divine attestations, in which all *Imposture* must be defective.

You yourself allow that many Impostors have gone so far as to lay down their lives rather than retract their pretensions, from pride, obstinacy, or principle.

principle. (p. 34.) Consider how far the last of these alone may carry a man, who should maintain the notion, which I believe is very common in the world; that it is lawful to lie and deceive for God's sake, or to encourage pious frauds. What should hinder such a one from endeavouring to promote among mankind a sense of their duties to God, their neighbour, and themselves, by a pretended Inspiration? This seems to have been the principle upon which *Numa* acted in his pretended discourses with *Egeria*; for it does not appear, that he carried on that imposture, in order to gain a Kingdom, as you represent it; but in order to reform it after he was elected: and numberless pretended miracles, attributed to Saints and reliques, in order to promote Christianity, both in the East and West, arose from the same Principle. And what shall we say of Mahomet? His intention seems to have been, to unite the professors of the three different Religions of the Christians, Jews, and Pagans, in the knowledge and worship of one eternal invisible God, by whose power all things were made^a; to destroy the gross Idolatry, into which the generality of his countrymen had fallen; and to replant the ancient Religion professed by Adam, Noah, Moses, Jesus, and all the prophets^b. Accordingly, the Oath that was taken by his followers was this; To renounce all Idolatry, not to steal, nor commit fornication, nor kill their children, (as the Pagans used to do, when they apprehended they should not be able to maintain them^c), nor to forge calumnies; and to obey the prophet in all things reasonable^d. He was, no doubt, well satisfied of the grand principle he went upon, i. e. the unity of God, which he never speaks of but with great warmth; and it is not improbable, that

^a Sale's Koran. Prelim. Dis. p. 62.

^b Koran ch. 2.

^c Ib. ch. vi.

^d Sale, 47.

by living so much in the cave of Hara, and contemplating this truth, and the benefits which must arise to his country from the belief of it, he might by degrees work himself up, by the help of a warm imagination, into a belief, that he himself was design'd by God to bring about the great reformation; however he might carry it on afterwards by views of a political nature. For it is remarkable, that this happened at a time, when pure Christianity was almost driven out of the world; and the worship of Saints and Angels carried to such a pitch, as surpass'd even what is now practised by the Church of Rome.—Where was the appearance to the world, of folly or madness, or even enthusiasm, in all this?

F. I argue, that Christ is the only founder of a Religion which is totally unconnected with human policy; that he did not aim at power or riches, &c.

Ch. This may be a presumptive proof of his good designs, but will be no sufficient proof of his divine mission, even though he should believe it himself. Is not the spirit of enthusiasm a sufficient answer to this plea, if used as a direct Proof? But I would ask, what would have been the consequence, had it pleased God, that Christ should have made his first appearance, in the character, in which he is expected to appear hereafter, in a glorious and triumphant State? would that have been a reason to reject him? so far from it, that, in all human probability, the Jews would more readily have acknowledged him, and joined themselves to him. Here again I would observe, that none of these detached arguments are to be considered as absolute proofs, but merely as presumptive evidence before, and confirmations after the Fact is proved.

F. I defy all history to shew one who ever made his own sufferings and death a necessary part of the original plan. p. 34.

Ch.

Ch. But there have been more than one, who have voluntarily offered their heads to be cut off in proof of their divine mission; and actually undergone the operation, declaring that they should come to Life again ^a: and surely this was as strong a proof of their own belief of it as could be given. But what was the consequence? *Our Saviour* rose again, and *they* did *not*. The prophecy alone is no evidence in either case; the proof lies in the accomplishment. Leave the accomplishment out of the question, and the true Messiah is upon the same footing, in respect of any evidence in his favour from the Prophecy alone, as the false ones:—But let us argue from the reason of the thing. God Almighty knows that men will lay down their lives through pride, obstinacy, or principle, rather than retract their pretensions, though they know them to be false. Is it then possible to imagine, that he should send any person into the world upon an affair of such infinite importance, and expect us to believe that person upon his own single testimony? Let us examine it by Scripture. If I bear witness of myself, says *our Saviour*, my witness is not true, i. e. it is not to be depended upon: the works which the Father hath given me to do, the same bear witness of me ^b. And again, search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal Life, and they are they which testify of me ^c: and the same kind of Testimony he refers to in his answer to the disciples of St. John the Baptist, Matt. ii. 5. And the Miracles which he wrought were so necessary to establish the proof of his divine Mission, that if that Evidence had not been given, the Jews would have been excusable in rejecting him; and could this have been the case, if

^a See John a Lent de Judæorum Pseudo-messias, p. 38 & 50.

^b John v. 31. 36, 37. ^c Jo, v. 39.

the internal Evidence of the doctrine had been a sufficient proof of its divine origin?

F. How do you prove that assertion?

Ch. From the words of Christ, Jo. x. 37. "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not:" And again, Jo. xv. 24. "If I had not done among them the works which no other man did, they had not had sin; but now they have both SEEN and hated both me and my Father." In short, it is not *probable* or *plausible* argument, as I observed, that we can depend upon in this case, where our everlasting happiness is concerned; but *absolute* Proof; and there can be no *absolute* Proof from any thing within the power of man to perform; and consequently there can be no such assurance but from a divine attestation: and if you can say no more than this in defence of Christianity, I would sooner pin my Faith upon the Evidence of Mahomet, and take my character of Christ from the Koran. For there I shall learn that Christ was the *eternal Word incarnate*^a; that God gave the strongest *attestations* to his divine Mission by *evident Miracles*^b; that by his permission he *healed the blind* from their birth, and *brought forth the dead* from their graves; and that God gave him *manifold Signs*, and strengthened him by his *holy Spirit*^c; proving that he is the word of God^d, and the word of Truth^e; and that he was begotten of the Virgin Mary by the immediate power of God^f. From these principles his divine mission must appear undeniable: whereas not one of your presumptive arguments will rise so high.

F. You must be sensible that Mahomet, Numa, and even Moses himself, blended their religious institutions with their civil, and by them obtained dominion over their respective people. (p. 33.)

^a Koran, p. 161.

^b Ibid. ch. v. p. 97.

^c Ch. ii. and v. p. 30 and 97.

^d Ch. iv. p. 80.

^e Ch. xix.

^f P. 250. ch. xix.

Ch. I am sensible of no such thing. I have spoken of Numa and Mahomet already; and where do you find that Moses got dominion by that means? The history tells us the contrary, *Exod.* iii. He was a leader of the Israelites, and delivered them from slavery before the Law was given; and no man ever rejected such an offer of dominion as was made to him. *Deut.* ix. 14. But can you think of defending Christianity at the expence of Judaism? If what you say of Moses is an objection to his divine Mission (and I can see it in no other light), how will you maintain the divine Mission of Christ, who not only speaks of him as a prophet, but puts the proof of his own mission upon his testimony ^a. So that if Moses was an Impostor, Christ must be so too.—I know very well that Mr. Hume and other deistical writers, as well as some others, have so puzzled the question of late about miracles, defining them to be contradictions to the Laws of nature (which can in no instance be proved ^b), that the belief of them is by that means grown very much out of fashion among the minute philosophers. And there are many who admire the morality of the New Testament, and would be willing enough to be called Christians, if there was nothing more to be believed but the Scripture morality, as received by Chub, or the Christianity which is as old as the Creation, according to Tindal: But as to Miracles and Prophecy, and the Revelation given to Moses, they beg to be excused. And I don't wonder if some, who fancy themselves Christians, may be ready to compromise the matter with the Deists, and, provided they allow that there is *something* divine in the Revelation of the New Testament; may not require them to know *what* it is, or *how* it can be

^a *Lu.* 24. 27. *Jo.* v. 45.

^b See Ben. Mord. vii. Let. Postscript.

proved. Whereas the whole system of Revelation, declaring and explaining the beauty of the divine Œconomy from the beginning to the end, is so linked together in itself, as well as by our Saviour's appeal to the Prophecies, that whoever disbelieves either the Miracles or Prophecies, has not so substantial a proof of Christianity, or so just an idea of its author, as he might collect from the Koran.

F. But is it not sufficient to observe the many passages relating to a future state, the Resurrection of the dead, and a future judgment; such cogent exhortations to the practice of Virtue, and ardent excitements to devotion, as are every where stamped with such apparent marks of supernatural assistance, as render them indisputably superior, and totally unlike all human Compositions whatsoever? (p. 40, 41.)

Ch. I know of no Christian, but what is intimately affected by all these particulars: but the reason is not upon account of the language, but because they are perfectly satisfied of the attestation of God to the truths on which this pathetic language is built.—That the doctrine of a future State and Judgment was maintained by the heathens, I have already proved from the words of Socrates and Cicero.—And as all the moral precepts of natural and revealed religion tend to improve mankind in the same virtues, they must be like one another, or rather the very same, though perhaps differently expressed. But I don't recollect, that the Critics represent its stile to be entirely faultless; or that any man of sense expects it to be so.

F. If any one can doubt of the superior Excellence of Christianity, above all Religions that preceded it, he is as deficient in Taste as in Faith, and as bad a Critic as he is a Christian.

Ch. And yet one of these preceding Religions was a *divine Revelation*.—But I hope you do not mean

mean that we are to trust the Truth of Christianity to our taste for elegance and criticism. The Mahometans have nothing better to depend on, and are therefore in the right to make the most of this argument. The Koran is universally allowed to be written with the utmost elegance of stile and purity of language, in the most noble and polite dialect, and is the standard of the Arabic Tongue^a: and from these circumstances, the Mahometans conclude, that it could not be composed by men or angels, but by God himself^b. But to think of using such an Argument in proof of Christianity, and neglecting the sure foundation of a divine attestation, is the most amazing thing in the world.

F. You may observe this superiority and dissimilarity are more strongly marked by one remarkable circumstance, i. e. that whilst the moral parts are intelligible to the meanest capacity, the learned and inquisitive in all ages perpetually find in them inexhaustible discoveries concerning the nature and attributes, and dispensations of Providence. (p. 41, 42.)

Ch. 1st. I answer, In all writings whatever, the moral part must necessarily be more intelligible than what is written upon more difficult subjects; and therefore this observation is not at all peculiar to the new Testament.

2. If you allow that the *moral* parts are *intelligible* to the *meanest* capacity (which you deny, p. 19. and tell us, they are so difficult to be understood, as reveled by Christ, that we can scarcely believe him), where is the improbability that they might have been investigated by men of the *greatest* capacity, without any external revelation at all?

3. As to the inexhaustible discoveries you speak of, there is not a syllable of them, that without a

^a Sale Prelim. Dis. p. 60.

^b Koran, ch. x. p. 170. ch. xvii. p. 236.

divine attestation, can be so much as proved to be true.

F. To say the truth, before Christianity there existed nothing like Religion on the earth, the Jewish only excepted, p. 42. all other nations were immersed in the greatest Idolatry.

Ch. That only proves that their Religion was corrupt and erroneous: but did they not by degrees improve?

F. In the politest ages of the politest nations, when Greece and Rome carried the arts of Oratory, Mathematicks, natural and moral Philosophy, to the highest Perfection, no advances at all were made in Religious knowledge. (p. 43.)

Ch. I can't conceive what you mean. Does not Horace expose the Superstition of Agamemnon, in offering up his daughter for a fair wind?

Tu cum pro vitula, &c. Sat. 1. ii. 3. v. 199.
When your own child you to the altar led —
And pour'd the salted meal upon her head;
When you beheld the lovely Victim slain
Unnatural Father, were you found in brain?

Does not he attack another instance of superstition in the same Satyr?

Jupiter ingentes, &c. l. 288.
Her child beneath a quartan fever lies
For full five months, when the fond mother cries,
Sickness and health are thine, all-pow'rful Jove;
Then from my boy this dire disease remove:
And when your priests thy solemn Fast proclaim
Naked the boy shall stand in Tyber's stream,
Should chance or the Physicians art upraise
Her infant from this desperate disease;
The frantick Dame shall plunge her hapless boy;
Bring back the Fever and the child destroy.
Tell me what Horrors thus have turn'd her head?
Of the good Gods a Superstitious dread.

Is

Is not the turning the mind from Superstition to Reason and Common-sense, an improvement in Religious Knowledge? The Romans neither offered up their children nor sacrificed their captives at the tombs of their Heroes. And some of them wrote very excellently upon the Subjects of Morality and natural Religion: did not all this help to advance religious Knowledge? a strong proof, that the noble efforts of the human mind, could make great advances in religious Knowledge, even without a Revelation. (p. 44.)

F. Some few of their philosophers were wise enough to reject these general absurdities, and dared to attempt a loftier flight. Plato introduced many sublime Ideas of Nature and its first cause, and of the immortality of the Soul.

Ch. And can there be a more plane confession, that these notions were not new, and unheard of before Christianity?

F. But he probably acquired his knowledge from the books of Moses, or the conversation of some Jewish Rabbies, which he might have met with in Egypt. (p. 44.)

Ch. And where did this Jewish Rabbi get his knowledge? *perhaps* from the books of Moses. But the Bishop of Gloucester will tell you, the doctrine of a future State is not to be found there. And where did the ancient Britons get their notion of a future State? for it was held by the Druids^a.

F. I build my opinion upon this; that the Doctrine is above all human discovery: and therefore must be derived from some former Revelation. (p. 44.)

Ch. This is merely begging the question in dispute: On the contrary, we know that Plato derived his belief of it from his own reasoning; and the Reasons are to be seen in his Phædon.

^a Lucan. Phar. L. 1.

F. I allow that from Plato, Aristotle, and from both Cicero, and some others, drew most amazing stores of Philosophical Science; but these were bright Constellations, &c. (p. 45)

Ch. They were so; and made great advances in religious knowledge; which is the very fact which you deny.

F. However, you must confess that these Philosophers, with all their knowledge, were very deficient in true Theology (p. 45).

Ch. 'Tis true; but can no advances be made in religious knowledge till we become perfect in our Theology? and know whether God is three Beings, or only three Characters?

F. I own that from the visible works of Creation they traced the being and principal attributes of the Creator; but the relation which his being and attributes bear to man, they little understood; piety and devotion they had scarce any sense of (p. 44).

Ch. This is mere misrepresentation. Did they know him to be their Creator that gave them life and breath, and all things; and did they not see what relation his being and attributes bore to his creatures? Did they believe his principal attributes of Justice and Goodness, &c. and describe him as *Deus Optimus* as well as *Maximus*, the best as well as the greatest, and had no sense of piety and devotion? Surely these heathens were the errantest blockheads that ever lived: but there is no argument like fact. I shall therefore give you the words of Clearcus to Tissaphernes, about 400 years before Christ, during the expedition of the 10,000 Greeks. "The first and most important thing to be considered is, that our oaths to the Gods forbid us to be enemies to one another: and whoever is conscious of his neglecting the Gods, him I shall never look upon as fortunate or happy. For I know no swiftness that can
4 " save

“ save him when at enmity with *them*; nor within
 “ what darknefs he can hide himself, nor in what
 “ strong-hold he can secure himself. For *all things*
 “ every where are subject to *them*, and *they* are
 “ equally powerful *every where* over *all*. And
 “ this is my opinion concerning the *Gods* and our
 “ *oaths*; whom we have made the Guarantees of
 “ our friendship.” See also the quotations from
 Cicero and the Stoicks already cited.

F. There was not one of them that could form any mode of worship worthy of the purity and perfection of the Divine Nature (p. 45).

Ch. I should be glad to know who can.

F. They sometimes flung out occasionally many elegant encomiums on the beauty of virtue.

Ch. It is true, and wrote whole volumes upon Morality and natural Religion, and very excellent ones.

F. But they did not found their virtue upon the commands of God.

Ch. They founded their Religion on the dictates of Conscience, which they understood to be the Commands of God revealed to them by the understanding. “ Hence it is, says Cicero, that God
 “ becomes, as it were, the common Instructor and
 “ Governor of Mankind: it was he who com-
 “ posed, examined, and promulged them.” Could Cicero say this, and not look upon the dictates of Conscience to be the Commands of God?

F. But they did not connect it with a holy Life.

Ch. We are told the contrary by St. Paul; who says, “ When the Gentiles who have not the Law,
 “ do by nature the things contained in the Law,
 “ these, not having the Law, are a Law unto them-
 “ selves: which shews the work of the Law writ-
 “ ten in their hearts; their consciences also bear-
 “ ing witness, and their thoughts the mean time
 “ ac-

“accusing, or else excusing, one another^a.” And Cicero says, “I prefer the Testimony of Conscience to what all mankind can say of me;” and that “Conscience is the only theatre for Virtue^b.”

F. They sometimes indeed talked of virtue’s carrying men to Heaven, and placing them among the Gods.

Ch. It seems then, at last, that the Belief of a reward in Heaven was hung out before Christianity, by your own confession.

F. But by Virtue they mean’d only the invention of arts, or feats of arms; for with them Heaven was only open to Legislators, Conquerors, Civilizers or Destroyers of Mankind (p. 46).

Ch. Do you imagine Cicero was of that opinion? “Though the ring of Gyges, says he, was in the possession of a wise man, and would make him invisible, he would think himself no more authorized to commit a bad action, than if he was not possessed of it; for good men consider only the intrinsic excellence and beauty of an action, and not whether it can be concealed^c.” What does he mean, when, speaking of Love, he mentions debaucheries, intreagues, adulteries, and incest, as crimes of the greatest magnitude? What will you say to Horace’s character of a wise or good man?

Sapiens, sibi qui imperiosus. Lib. xi. Sat. vii. 81.

— — The wise, who well maintains
An Empire o’er himself, whom neither chains
Nor want, nor death, with slavish fear inspire;
Who boldly answers to his warm desire.
Who can ambition’s vainest gifts despise,
Firm in himself, who on himself relies.

^a Rom. iii. 4—8.

^b Thoughts of Cic. 73.

^c Ibid. 85.

Polish'd and round, who runs his proper course;
And breaks misfortune with superior force.

FRANCIS.

Does all this look as if there were no other virtues among the Heathens besides feats of arms, &c.?

F. At this time Christianity broke forth from the East like a rising sun, and dispelled that universal darkness in which all the world was involved except a few Philosophers.

Ch. It is true that the whole world was involved in Polytheism and other errors; and Philosophy had not influence enough on their minds to recover them out of it. But this darkness was not so much a defect in their knowledge of Morality, with which many of them were well acquainted, as a defect in the knowledge of God's benevolent Nature, and the history of his gracious Providence, and of such motives as were necessary to promote the practice of their duties. For they had a Law written in their hearts and consciences before Christianity, otherwise they would not have been in a capacity of taking the first step required by Christ and his apostles, *i. e.* Repentance. For what should they repent of, if they had no Conscience of having acted wrong? What was wanted in order to reform the world was, the *authority* of a *divine Interposition*, which should persuade them to *attend* to a preacher of Righteousness, as the *Messenger of God*; and prove that Virtue was not only most *reasonable*, but most *profitable*; and of infinite *Consequence*. Accordingly we find St. Paul tells us that God Almighty punished them, because, when they *knew* God by the light of Nature, they worshiped him not *as God*; and this was the reason that he gave them over to a reprobate or injudicious mind^a. And it seems agreeable

^a Ro. i. 28.

to the same conduct, that when the Philosophers had gone as far as they were able, to reform the world by the investigation of moral Truths, God would instruct them farther, by giving them a light into such motives to a right practice, as they most ardently wished for, and Philosophy was not able to supply.—“As for me, says Cicero, I should be glad we could, *at any price*, engage some person to find out a NEW REASON, which should more strongly convince us, and make us more firmly believe, that Virtue alone is sufficient to make us happy^a.” And the words of Aristodemus are remarkable: “If I could once be persuaded that the Gods take care of men, I should want no monitor to remind me of my duty; and this I shall believe, when they *send their messengers* to inform me what I ought to do, and not to do^b.”—Now these wishes were abundantly supplied by the divine attestation which was given to the truths of the Gospel, by miracles and prophecies; whereas if Christ and his apostles had been deficient in this testimony, to authorize the truths they preached, the doctrines would probably have been as little regarded by the generality of the world as the doctrines of the Philosophers.

F. It is time for us now to enquire, what the advantages are, which have been discovered by this Revelation: for it is certain, that, from those countries which it has reached, it has banished all those enormities (p. 47), and introduced a more rational devotion and purer morals (p. 48).

Ch. The motives to a righteous practice being so much more powerful in Christianity than in Natural Religion, ought in Reason, and certainly would have produced these effects, if men had ob-

^a Thoughts of Cic. 331. Tusc. v. 7.

^b Xenoph. Memor. lib. i. c. 4.

served them, and given them a proper influence over them; and all the enormities you speak of would certainly have been banished from the countries it reached, and purer morals been introduced in practice. But, by the wickedness of men, the advantages of the Christian Revelation have fallen very short of what might have been expected. You mention Idolatry as one of these enormities: but this still continues in the Christian Church; and the doctrine of Transubstantiation is more irrational than any that was ever maintained by the Heathens: and the purity of morals was never more thoroughly corrupted among them, than it has been among the Christians, by sanctifying massacres and murders, and the most barefaced perjuries and villanies of every kind, under the authority of papal indulgences and absolutions.

F. Has not Christianity taught men the Unity? (p. 48.)

Ch. And have not the Christians explained it away, by teaching us, that it is of so transcendental a nature, as to be consistent with a plurality of three Persons equally supreme^a?—But was not the Unity taught by the Heathens long before Christianity, as well as other truths, which, for want of a divine attestation, were but little regarded in the world? “The Philosophers of the
“Gentiles, says Paulus Orosius, whilst, with intense study, they enquired and searched into
“things, found that there was one God, the Author of all things, and to which One all things
“should be referred^b.” For though they thought that every thing superior to man was God, as Jerom observes, yet they acknowledged one supreme and unmade Deity^c. And Maximus Tyrius says, all nations whatever worshipped one supreme God,

^a B. Mord. Lett. vii. 148.

^b L. vi. c. i.

^c Cudw. Int. Sy. 281. 416.

and

and many inferior ones. And Sophocles, who lived several years before the Christian æra, declares that there is but one God, the creator of Heaven and Earth.

Εἷς ταῖς ἀληθείαισιν εἷς ἔστι Θεός,
Ὅς οὐρανόν τ' ἔτειξε καὶ γαῖαν μακρόν.

But, if Christianity has taught the Unity, how came you to imagine it was occasionally changed into a Plurality, and that God was sometimes one Being, and sometimes three?

F. Christianity also taught men the attributes of the Supreme Being (p. 48).

Ch. It is very true: but they were taught before by Moses and the Prophets; and you have confessed already (p. 45), that the Philosophers traced them from the visible Creation; and St. Paul says the same^a.

F. Christianity has also taught us the Remission of Sins (p. 48).

Ch. The Christianity which was preached by Christ and his Apostles taught it. But your Christianity teaches the contrary; that Repentance cannot cancel the old bonds (p. 112); and that a vicarious atonement has been already made; and, if so, there is no room for remission; for the sins have been already punished (p. 29).

F. Christianity has taught us the Resurrection of the dead, life everlasting, and the Kingdom of Heaven; doctrines as inconceivable to the wisest of mankind antecedent to Christianity, as the Newtonian system is now to the most ignorant savages (p. 48).

Ch. No man can read the works of the Heathens but must know all this to be a false representation. On the contrary, he will find that the hopes of Immortality glowed within their breasts;

^a Rom. i. 20. For the Invisible, &c.

that their souls panted after it; that their desires were enliven'd with the sense of their capacity for it: every thought in Cicero, Antoninus, Socrates, and other good men, favour'd every apprehension of it; they imbibed them with greediness; and Nature appeared in all her works to confirm their wishes: and though they had no certain foundation for absolute proof, yet, if you discard the divine attestation to the truth of the Gospel promises, by Prophecies and Miracles, your own belief, as I have observed, rests upon the same arguments as theirs^a, and will be as little regarded by the generality of mankind.

F. Before I leave this proposition, I would observe, that though human Reason could never have discover'd these doctrines, yet they coincide with it when reveled, and are confirmed by it (p. 48).

Ch. And yet you tell us (p. 175), that Reason is never so ill-employ'd as when she pretends to accommodate the doctrines of Revelation with her own Ideas of Rectitude and Truth. How are we to reconcile this? Are we to believe that God has enjoyn'd the belief of such things as appear to us to be absurd or false, or are we not? If it makes for the truth of Revelation, that it is agreeable to Reason; what shall we say to the two Propositions which you tell us plainly contradict our Reason (p. 160. 162), That God is sometimes one and sometimes three, or "that
" three Beings should be sometimes only one
" Being;" and that God should punish the innocent instead of the guilty, which you allow to be contrary to justice, rectitude, and all pretences to utility? These Doctrines are so far from being confirmed by Reason, or coinciding with it, that, if it can be proved that they are maintain'd in the New Testament, the internal Evidence of their Falsity must entirely overturn its Credibility: for

^a See Plato's Phæd. Cicero, &c.

it is impossible that such doctrines, as are inconsistent with the divine attributes, should be parts of a divine Revelation ; much less afford an internal proof of its divine origin.

F. The facts I have mention'd are too glaring to be contradicted ; and therefore, whatever we may think of the authority of these books, the relations which they contain, and the inspiration of their authors, yet of these facts no man who has eyes to read, or ears to hear, can entertain a doubt : because, there are the books, and in them is this Religion.

Ch. Confident assertions prove nothing. There is not a single Text in the New Testament which declares that Christ was ever *punished* by God : and yet men have ventured, upon such a notion, to declare that God cursed his own son ; saying, " Go thou cursed, cursed in body, cursed in " soul ^a." Nor is there a single Text of Scripture to prove that God is sometimes three Beings, and sometimes only one, though you seem so certain of it ; and consequently you have given us your own gloss instead of the Scripture doctrine : and these glaring Facts are mere chimeras.

You undertook to prove, that from the New Testament may be extracted a system of Religion entirely new to the Heathens ; both with regard to the *object* and the *doctrines* : not only infinitely *superior* to, but totally *unlike*, every thing that had ever before enter'd into the heart of man.—And you have seen it proved, from their writings before Christianity, that the Religion of the Heathens hung out the same Heaven, as the object of their hopes, and the reward of Virtue :—and that by Virtue they understood the same moral perfections which are prescribed in the New Testament, as,

^a Jos. Allen's Remains, p. 193, quoted in Emlyn's Tracts, vol. i. p. 256.

our duties to God, our neighbour, and ourselves. —And indeed how could it be otherwise? How could this be a state of Trial, in which men were to improve in Virtue, except by improving in these duties?—The practice of these Virtues, in hopes of a reward from God, is the practice of natural Religion; and the practice of the same Virtues, from a belief of the Revelation given us by Christ, is so far the practice of Christianity.—It is therefore impossible that, in the moral precepts, Christianity and natural Religion should be unlike one another.

On the other hand, if you suppose that these doctrines were never known before Christianity, you must suppose, that there was no law of Nature, no knowledge of Right and Wrong in the World, and men were not accountable to God for their actions, for above 4000 years. And can we believe this? or that Solon, Lycurgus, and the other great men who composed laws for whole nations, relative to temperance, justice, and piety, had no knowledge of these Virtues? And, if we could believe it, does not all history convince us of the contrary? and St. Paul himself tells us, that they had a law written in their *hearts*, and a *conscience* accusing or excusing them. And do not Christ and his apostles always speak of our moral duties, as *well known*, but *badly practised*? Accordingly Bishop Sherlock, speaking of the law of Nature, says, very justly, “ Though the world
“ was the worse for abusing it, and wanted to be
“ informed by a divine instructor; yet the Reli-
“ gion of Nature [*i. e.* the Religion which right
“ Reason taught, when it was applied to] was not
“ the worse for being abused, but still retained
“ its first purity and simplicity ^a. ” And therefore

^a Sermon before the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel.

all Revelation, given to improve mankind in virtue and real worth, cannot possibly be any thing entirely new, as to our practice; but either a Republication of the Laws of Nature, which they had neglected, or motives to obey it, or means tending to promote an obedience to it: and no other foundation is able to support the superstructure of Revelation, since no Revelation can be worthy of God, or make us like him, or bring us to him, which does not tend to make us better men, and to promote the virtue and happiness of the universe by the moral improvement of the individuals.—You have no less mistaken the particulars wherein the *infinite superiority* of Christianity over natural Religion consists, though you have repeated the words so often. It did not consist in an unmeasurable perfection in the Justice recommended by Christianity, above the Justice recommended by the heathens; for Justice is not capable of degrees, every action being either just or unjust: (nor are we by the help of Christianity enabled to answer the cases of Conscience, which are mentioned by Cicero, any better than *he* could^a); but it consisted in the *assurance* of an eternal Reward to the righteous—in declaring the love of God to mankind, and his gracious invitation to everlasting happiness; in disclosing the amazing history of his gracious providence, and the means of our salvation, from the beginning to the end of things—whereby the Love of God and Christ became examples for us to follow in our love to one another, with absolute assurance of Reward. It was in these doctrines, which were the pure doctrines of Christianity, *attested by miracles and prophecy*, that the infinite superiority of Christianity over natural Religion consisted; not in the teaching such principles of morality as were

^a Thoughts of Cic. 129, &c. Off. iii. 12.

never heard before; but in introducing the principle of Love as the great Rule of our Conduct, a principle of action, which extends beyond the boundaries of morality or duty, and indeed is infinite, and the certainty of eternal Life to the Virtuous: This was the Light that enlightened the Gentiles, and cast a Glory over the whole System of Revelation.

The Third Proposition.

F. My third proposition consists of three parts, and is this; 1. That from this book, called the New Testament, may be collected a system of Ethics, in which every moral precept founded on *reason* is carried to a higher degree of purity and perfection, than in any of the ancient Philosophers of preceding ages.—2. Every moral precept, founded on false principles is entirely omitted.—3. And many new precepts added, peculiarly corresponding with the new object of this Religion.

Ch. On the first part of this Proposition, I would ask, is it not strange, that the very precepts, which you here allow to be founded upon *Reason*, and to enforce the practice of such duties as *Reason* informs us must improve our natures, and conduce to the happiness of mankind; such as Piety to God, &c. (p. 51.) should be the same which we are told by you in the 2d Proposition, (p. 17.) are *entirely new* both with regard to the object and the doctrines, not only infinitely superior to, but *totally unlike* every thing which had before entered into the heart of man? Is not this allowing all that I have been saying, viz. that these virtues were known among the Heathens before Christianity? and how else should we know that these Virtues are founded on true Principles?

2. You add, that every moral precept, founded on false principles is omitted. But how do we know what precepts they are that are founded

upon false principles? If we cannot distinguish them from those that are founded on true principles, where shall we find any internal marks of a divine origin and superior excellence? And if we can distinguish them, it can only be by our Reason, which you have so often rejected as of no use in matters of Revelation. And if so, why might we not come to the knowledge of our duties in a great measure by the same Reason, without Revelation, as was the case of Socrates, Cicero, &c. But let us hear what these precepts are which you say are founded upon false principles, and are omitted in the Christian system.

F. The first of these is Valour or active Courage. This is for the most part constitutional, and therefore can have no more merit than beauty, wit, strength, &c. (p. 53.)

Ch. As far as it is constitutional it certainly ought not to be considered as a moral precept: For the morality of every action arises from an act of the will. Besides, “that sort of courage, “as Cicero observes, which is seen in the dangers “and fatigues of war; unless a man be governed “by the rules of *Justice*; and fight for the safety “and good of the *publick*; and not for *private* “ends of his own, is altogether blameable; and “so far from being a part of *true* Virtue, that it “is indeed a piece of the most barbarous *inhumanity*. Courage or Fortitude is therefore well “defined by the Stoick Philosophers, when they “call it a *Virtue* contending for *justice* and *honour* ^a.”

F. It may be so. But Valour is so far from producing any salutary effects by introducing peace and order, and happiness into Society, that it is the usual perpetrator of all the violences; which from retaliated injuries distract the world with bloodshed and devastation.

^a Offic. i. 19.

Cb. You reason here in the same way you do about the Light of Revelation, that it lights men into Error. (p. 120.)

But surely, if Valour produces the miseries you complane of, does not Valour withstand them, and put an end to them? and if the introducing misery and distress among men, is a vice, the resisting it, and putting an end to it, must be a Virtue.

F. Valour indeed was congenial with the Religion of the Heathens — with them it was the First of Virtues; and even engrossed that denomination to itself. (p. 54.)

Cb. Do you mean to inform us, that *Virtus* among the Romans frequently means Valour? Does it follow from hence, that they had no notion of any other virtue? If they took their notion of Valour from the Greeks, as defined by Plato, it reaches to all the actions of Life, and includes all other Virtues in the pursuit of Rectitude^a.

F. Few or none are the occasions in which Christians are permitted to exert it.

Cb. Was not Christianity from the beginning carried on by an exertion of active Courage; when Christ and his Apostles preached a doctrine contrary to the Religion of the World, at the risque and expence of their lives?

F. But Christians are so far from being allowed to inflict Evil; that they are forbid even to resist it: they are so far from being encouraged to revenge injuries, that one of their first duties is to forgive them. So far from being incited to destroy their Enemies, that they are commanded to love them, and serve them to the utmost of their power.

Cb. True genuine Courage is far more consistent with forgiveness of injuries, and a humane temper of mind towards our Enemies, than cowardice

^a See Plato's *Laches*, and Cicero's *Offic.* Lib. i. cap. 26.

is. Many instances of this may be given from History. But if you suppose that Christians have not a right to defend themselves from injuries, you must contradict what you say a few pages farther on, where you allow that resistance is not forbidden by Christianity, even to the reigning power. (p. 63.) Can you then maintain the doctrine of passive obedience and non-resistance, upon the Texts of Scripture you have quoted? Will you venture to assert, that the many thousand Christians which have been massacred in France and elsewhere, had no Right to defend their lives, properties, and religion? and that this Nation acted contrary to the Laws of Christ, when they called in King William, of glorious memory, to defend them from popery and arbitrary power?

F. I assert, that active Courage is not a Christian Virtue; because a Christian can have nothing to do with it. (p. 56.)

Ch. But your assertion is contrary to Fact.—In the circumstances we were in at the Revolution, nothing could have saved us, but a man of active Courage; a Courage which arose from the noblest dispositions of the human mind; from a contempt of danger, pain, and death; and a confidence in the favour and protection of the Almighty.—Such is the Resolution of a Christian determined to go through all difficulties, from a generous Love of his fellow-creatures, and a consciousness that he is pleasing God. May the glorious and immortal Memory of our great Preserver be for ever celebrated in this Country by all the Friends of Liberty and true Religion!

F. The 2d instance I shall mention of such moral Precepts as are founded upon false Principles, is Patriotism. That virtue, which so long preserved the liberties of Greece, and exalted Rome to the Empire of the world. This also must be excluded,

because it falls short of the extensive benevolence of this Religion. (p. 58.)

Ch. Is there no Virtue in preserving the *Liberties* of Mankind? and does an action cease to be *virtuous*, because the Virtue exercised may be *farther extended*? The influence of Justice and Piety, says Cicero, is great towards our Parents and Relations; but greatest to our Country ^a.—Are Justice and Piety therefore no Virtues, when exercised towards our Parents and Relations, because they may be exercised in a *higher* degree towards our Country?

F. But Patriotism *counteracts* the extensive benevolence of Christianity, and commands us to oppress all other Countries, to advance the imaginary Prosperity of our own. It enjoins us to copy the mean Partiality of an English Parish-officer, who thinks injustice and cruelty meritorious whenever they promote the interest of their own inconsiderate Village.

Ch. I can't conceive where you get your Definitions;—true Patriotism consists in the *love of our Country*, and our endeavour to promote its happiness by *honest* and *just* means, not by dishonest and unjust ones.—But let us refer to a judge, who was a Patriot himself, and knew well what belonged to the glorious Character: and we shall be entertained with Ideas of a more exalted Nature.

“ When a man, says Cicero, has learned to despise
 “ those things which the vulgar esteem; and to
 “ distinguish Truth from Falshood; and is con-
 “ vinced that Nature designed him for Society; he
 “ would put in practice that comprehensive Elo-
 “ quence, which is necessary for governing Na-
 “ tions, enacting Laws, punishing malefactors,
 “ defending the honest part of mankind, and pub-
 “ lishing the praises of great men: He would use

^a Thoughts of Cic. 279.

“ his persuasive Eloquence to recommend *salutary*
 “ *Maxims* to his Countrymen; to rouse them to
 “ the practice of Virtue, and turn them from
 “ Wickedness.” And what has this to do with
 the oppression of other Countries?

F. Patriotism has ever been a favourite Virtue with mankind, because it conceals self-interest under the mask of publick Spirit, not only from others, but even from themselves.

Ch. When you speak of *Patriotism*, we must understand you to mean what you say, and not to mean *private Interest* under the name of Patriotism. You might as well find fault with *Piety*; and then tell us you mean’d *hypocrisy* under the mask of *Piety*. But when you disapprove of *Friendship* and *true patriotism* under a pretended regard to *universal benevolence*, you deceive your Reader with a very fallacious argument. For it will always be found, that the more these principles are *discouraged*, the more the mind will be *contracted*. And the reason is, that our great and generous principles were designed by the God of Nature to extend, *by degrees*, from *self* to a *friend*; from thence to a *family*, and from thence to our *Country*, &c. And our capacity for happiness extends in the same proportion.—But I have hitherto only considered the Patriotism of a *Citizen* or *Subject*; who is but seldom capable of doing any material Service to his Country. Whereas, if we look to the glorious Character of a *Patriot King*^a, whose desire of conferring happiness through a whole Kingdom, is equal to his power of doing it: There can be no idea of any Being in this world, who must be so happy in himself, and so truly worthy of our love, esteem, and admiration.

F. Friendship is a 3d instance of such moral precepts as are founded upon false Principles;

^a See Lord Bolingbroke’s Idea of a Patriot King.

which

which though more congenial to the principles of Christianity, and arising from more tender and amiable dispositions; could never gain admittance amongst the benevolent precepts of Christianity, for the same reason, because it is too narrowly confined; and appropriates that benevolence to a single object, which is here commanded to be extended over all. (p. 60.)

Ch. How can Friendship be *more* congenial to Christianity, even upon your own principles, if it does not approach *nearer to universal benevolence*? If Patriotism is a vice because it appropriates benevolence to a *Few*; Friendship must be a more enormous Vice, because it is *more confined*. And yet our Saviour had his Friend in St. John: and when he would describe the highest instance of Love and Regard, which one man can pay to another, he instances in point of *Friendship*. “Greater Love than this hath no man, that he will lay down his Life for *his Friends* ^a.”

F. When Friendships arise from familiarity of sentiments, and disinterested affections, they are advantageous, agreeable, and innocent; but have but little pretensions to merit:—but if they be formed from alliances in parties, factions and interests, or from a participation of Vices, the usual parents of what are called Friendships among mankind, they are then both mischievous and criminal. But let them be in their utmost Purity and they will deserve no recommendation from Christianity. (p. 61.)

Ch. If you have really no higher a notion of Friendship, or the bonds of Friendship, than you have described, I most heartily pity you. But our Saviour, as he speaks of Friendship in a very different manner; so he does of the *Ties* or *bonds* which should cement and join Friends together;

^a Jo. xv. 13.

“ ye are my Friends, says he to his disciples, if
 “ *ye do whatever I command you*^a.” i. e. if you
 obey the Laws of Righteousness and Truth.—
 And Cicero speaks in the same manner. “ The
 “ endearing affections of love and benevolence
 “ naturally arise from a discovery of Virtue.
 “ Those who are affected in this way, draw near
 “ and unite themselves, in order to enjoy the com-
 “ pany and social Virtues of the person beloved^b.
 “ In proportion as every man is confident of his
 “ own ability, and has such a stock of Virtue and
 “ Wisdom, with every other necessary qualification
 “ within himself, as to need no foreign assistance;
 “ so much the Keener will his desires be for friend-
 “ ship; and his care the greater in cultivating it.—
 “ Did Africanus stand in need of me? by no
 “ means. Nor indeed had I any occasion for his
 “ aid. However, being charmed with his Virtues,
 “ I loved him; and he had an affection to me,
 “ occasioned perhaps by the good opinion he had
 “ conceived of my manners. Our mutual be-
 “ nevolence encreased as we became better ac-
 “ quainted^c.” Again, “ when we meet with
 “ one, whose manners and nature tally exactly
 “ with our own, we are affected with a similar
 “ sensation of benevolence towards him; because
 “ in such a one we seem to discover the bright
 “ effluence, as it were, of Virtue and goodness;
 “ for there is nothing more amiable than Virtue;
 “ or a stronger incitement to Love; in so much
 “ that, on account of their Virtue and probity,
 “ we in a manner love those we never saw^d. And
 “ if so, is it any wonder that the affections of
 “ mankind are strongly wrought on, when Virtue
 “ and goodness are discovered in those with whom
 “ a social intercourse may be enjoyed^e.—But if any

^a Jo. xv. 14.^b Thoughts of Cic. 193.^c Ib. 191.^d Ib. 187.^e Ib. 189.

“ men,

“ men, *intoxicated with pleasures*, take upon them
 “ to reason about Friendship, which they know
 “ neither by Reason or Experience; they don’t
 “ merit our attention^a. — Where shall we meet
 “ with any, who do not prefer honours, magi-
 “ stracies, power, dignity, and riches to it? whence
 “ it is next to impossible to find true Friendship
 “ among the Votaries of ambition and Ministers
 “ of State^b. (In iis qui honoribus reque publica
 “ versantur.) Accordingly, it is a remarkable say-
 “ ing of Lælius, that Friendship can only be among
 “ the Good; and good men will never require any
 “ thing, but what is just and honourable; and
 “ (besides love and esteem) will have a mutual
 “ *Reverence* for each other. To deprive Friend-
 “ ship of this *Reverence*, is to rob it of its greatest
 “ ornament.—Friendship was given by nature, not
 “ to favour *Vice*, but to be an aid to *Virtue*.”
 Thoughts of Cic. 213.

F. To the judicious omission of these Virtues,
 we may add the remarkable Silence of Christianity
 on the subject of Civil Government, national Polity,
 and the Rights of war and peace. (p. 62.)

Ch. I can see nothing remarkable in its keeping
 Silence upon such particular Subjects, as were
 foreign to its design; Christianity was not calculated
 for such purposes, and therefore they could only
 be mentioned incidentally, as connected with the
 moral improvement of the Individuals.

F. If Christ had forbidden all Resistance to the
 reigning powers, he had constituted a plan of de-
 spotism;—had he prohibited all war, he must have
 left his followers an easy prey to every infidel in-
 vader;—had he permitted it, he must have licensed
 rapine and murder. (p. 63.)

^a Thoughts of Cic. 197.

^b Cic. de amic.—Thoughts, 209.

Ch. The civil Rights of mankind are entirely the same now that they were before Christianity; and are under the same *general* Laws of Justice and Probity, as the Rights of private Persons. And therefore our Saviour gave the same answer, when the question was asked, whether they should pay tribute to Cæsar, as he would have given between private men, i. e. he reduced the question from its peculiarity, to the *general* Law of Justice, in paying to every one their just dues and rights. But how is what you say here, consistent with what you told us a few pages before? that we are forbid to resist Evil, (p. 55.) and are only to be passively courageous? (p. 56.) How can it be consistent with the absolute condemnation of Patriotism, (p. 58.) and all war, (p. 55.) and your assertion that active Courage cannot be a Christian Virtue, because a Christian can have nothing to do with it? (p. 56.) If Resistance is allowed, Patriotism, Courage, and War, may be necessary to support it.

F. Let us now examine the 3d Member of this Proposition;—What are the new Precepts of this Religion, peculiarly corresponding with the new Object of it, the preparing us for the Kingdom of Heaven. Now the Precepts corresponding to this new object, are these. 1. Poornefs of Spirit. 2. Forgiveness of Injuries. 3. Charity. 4. Repentance. 5. Faith. 6. Self-abasement. 7. A detachment from the world; all of them moral duties, peculiar to this Religion, and absolutely necessary to the attainment of its end. (p. 63.)

Ch. I have already proved from the Words of Cicero and Socrates, that the happiness of Heaven was the *object* which the Heathens had in view: the *object* therefore is the same as in Christianity; and these precepts when rightly understood, correspond to this *object* in them both; but how do you explaine these precepts?

F.

F. By poorness of Spirit is to be understood, a disposition of mind meek, humble, submissive to power, void of ambition, patient of injuries, and free from all Resentment. p. 64.

Ch. The Text seems rather to relate to a contented Poverty and low station; and the sense seems to be, Blessed are they who are not ambitious after Riches, and high offices in this world; their humility and moderation shall be rewarded with riches and heavenly honours in the next. But we may as well consider the Virtue of meekness; as you have mentioned it, and it is spoken of in Scripture, as a Christian duty.

F. This doctrine was so new, and so opposite to the Ideas of all Pagan moralists; that they thought this temper of mind a criminal, and contemptible meanness; which must induce men to sacrifice the glory of their country, and their own honour, to a shamefull Pusillanimity, p. 64.

Ch. If they could not distinguish meekness and humility, from meanness and pusillanimity, they were poor creatures indeed; and certainly had no notion either of Christian or Pagan meekness. But this was not the case. Remember, says Antoninus, that the Virtue of *meekness* was given you to exercise upon *all occasions*^a. And again, Nature has given us *Meekness* as an antidote against the unreasonable^b. Again, Men were formed for one another; teach them *better* therefore, or *bear* with them^c: and he quotes the exemple of the Gods; and so does Phœnix in his speech to Achilles, in which he persuades him to subdue his anger. Ἀλλ' Ἀχιλλᾷ δάμασον θυμὸν μέγαν. Il. ix. 492.

F. Is it not strange that Christians should think and act so contrary to the *explicit declarations* of their master? (p. 65)

^a Ant. Med. ix. ii. 42.

^b Ib. viii. 59.

^c Mat. v. 5.

Cb. I know of no *explicit declarations* in Christianity, which require a man to sacrifice the glory of his country, or his own honour. Meekness and Humility are very consistent with Fortitude and Intrepidity; and will never be prevailed with, out of a shameful pusillanimity, to offer incense to an Emperor at Rome, or to tread the Cross under foot in China, or do any thing unworthy the character of a man of honour and a Christian.

F. Is it not from these notions, that we see the Christians avenging the smallest affronts by premeditated murder as individuals, on the principle of Honour; and in their national capacity destroying one another with fire and sword? (p. 65)

Cb. There is most certainly a medium between abject cowardice and savage barbarity; and in this medium the virtue of meekness consists; or else Phoenix would never have recommended it to Achilles.—With regard to war, the Heathens argued as we ought to do, that no war is defensible, that is not founded upon *justice* and *probity*. And with regard to private duels, this kind of *affected* heroism was neither in practice with the *Greeks* nor *Romans*. And therefore if *we* destroy one another out of pride, vanity, revenge, avarice, ambition, envy, and the *vilest* of all cowardice, the fear of acting right, we must not lay the fault upon the heathen morality, but upon ourselves. But if, under the idea of *meekness*, we are persuaded to be of so *poor a spirit*, as to suffer our Laws and Liberties to be trampled under foot, and not to defend our rights as subjects; let us hear what St. Paul says to the Centurion at Jerusalem: “ Is
“ it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Ro-
“ man, and uncondemned?” Acts xxii. 25.—And in the next chapter, when the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by to smite him on the mouth, what is his answer? “ God shall smite
“ thee, thou whited wall; for sittest thou there to
“ judge

“ judge me after the law, and commandest me to
 “ be smitten contrary to the law?” (xxiii. 3.) And
 in the xvth chapter we shall find a stronger proof
 of this. The magistrates at Philippi commanded
 Paul and Silas to be beaten with many stripes,
 and cast into prison: but the next morning sent to
 the keeper of the prison to let them go, ver. 35.
 St. Paul’s answer is very remarkable: “ They have
 “ beaten us openly uncondemned, *being Romans*,
 “ and cast us into prison; and now do they thrust
 “ us out *privily*? Nay, verily; but let them come
 “ themselves and *fetch* us out.” Does this look
 like non-resistance and passive obedience? or as if
 Christian meekness was inconsistent with a resolute
 defence of our Laws and Liberties? St. Paul was
 as ready as any man to submit to the laws of his
 country, as we plainly find in his Epistle to the
 Romans^a; but he knew that his own legal rights
 were as sacred as any of them, and the defence of
 them as *consistent* with Christianity.—He knew the
 rights of a Roman Citizen; and that there was no
 precepts in Christianity that oblig’d him to resign
 or betray them.

F. Another precept equally new, and no less excellent, is the Forgiveness of Injuries.—This was a lesson so new, and so utterly unknown, till taught by the doctrine of Christ, that the wisest nations and ages represented the desire of revenge as a mark of a noble mind: but how much more magnanimous, how much more beneficial to mankind, is forgiveness? (p. 69)

Ch. I intirely agree with you, that no greater proof can be given of a generous and heroick mind. And therefore, when Cicero complimented Cæsar, “ *that he forgot nothing except injuries*,” he knew that he gave him the highest praise.—Let

^a See Rom. xiii. “ Let every soul be subject to the higher powers,” &c.

any man read his oration in favour of Marcellus, and he will never more imagine that forgiveness of injuries was a virtue unknown to the Heathens. —“ You have conquered fierce and barbarous nations, says Cicero to Cæsar ;—but to conquer your own mind, to restrain your anger, to moderate your victory, not only to raise up your prostrate enemy—but to encrease his former dignity ;—he that does this, I do not compare him to the greatest of men, but I judge him to resemble a God.”—And again, “ When we hear or read of any thing that is done kindly, humanely, justly, moderately, and wisely, especially in a state of anger (which is an enemy to counsel), and after victory (which is naturally insolent and proud), and this not only in true accounts, but even in such as are feign’d ; how do we love even those whom we have never seen !” When we consider that this speech was deliver’d in the name and presence of the whole senate of Rome, how can we imagine that these principles were not at that time universally look’d upon as virtuous ?

But we may carry this opinion still higher, to the time of Socrates, who speaks of it expressly as a moral precept, in Plato’s *Criton*, ch. v.

“ *Soc.* Is it just to return an injury, as many assert, or unjust ?

“ *Crit.* Unjust.

“ *Soc.* Certainly ; for to injure any one differs not from doing injustice.

“ *Crit.* You say true.

“ *Soc.* Therefore we ought not to return an injury, or do evil to any, whatever we may suffer from him. I know that few people think, or will think, in this manner. Let us then fix this as a principle to argue from, that it is neither just to do an injury, nor to return one ; nor
“ when

“ when we have suffered an evil to revenge it
 “ by doing evil to those who have injured us.”

And the same was the opinion of other heathen Philosophers, some of which are quoted by Gro-
 tius on Mat. v. 39.^a

F. A third precept, first noticed and first en-
 joyn'd by Christianity, is charity to all men. This
 commandment was entirely new when given by
 him, who so entitles it, saying, “ A new com-
 “ mandment I give unto you, that ye love one
 “ another.” (p. 71).

Ch. How a man can imagine that Christ in-
 tended to inform us, that the love of our fellow-
 creatures was a duty entirely new, is amazing: it
 is implanted in the nature of man; and to support
 such an hypothesis we must discard our humanity
 and natural feelings. Let us appeal to Cicero, in
 whose noble and generous sentiments we see human
 Nature in a respectable light, and hear what he
 thought of this Virtue before this new command-
 ment was given. “ What, says he, can be con-
 “ ceiv'd more happy than the state of that man—
 “ who maintains a benevolent intercourse with his
 “ friends, and in that number includes the *whole*
 “ *Race of Mankind*, as being united in one com-
 “ mon Nature—not as confin'd within the walls of
 “ one city, or as the member of any one commu-
 “ nity, but as a citizen of the universe considered
 “ as one state.” Let us hear the maxims of the
 Stoicks: “ Mankind we ought from our hearts to
 “ love, to have a tender care of, to bear with their
 “ weakness, and abstain from all kind of injury;
 “ to do them all the good we can; to let all be-
 “ hold us dedicate ourselves to the publick good,
 “ and be beneficent to all, deeming it our own

^a See Antonin. vii. 22. xi. 18, where the reasons for the
 Practice of this Virtue are enumerated,

“ good that we have done good to others ^a, &c.”
 “ These precepts, as Gataker observes, breathe
 “ piety, charity, humanity, and magnanimity.” I
 am sure they breathe *human Nature*, if there is any
 one principle in human Nature except self-
 love.

F. But is not this plainly called a new com-
 mandment? (p. 75)

Ch. It is so; and may properly be called so,
 either because it was not one of the ten command-
 ments which was given to the Jews; and yet they
 were commanded to love both their neighbour and
 the stranger ^b: or it might be called new, because
 the manner of their love is here intimated, “ *as I*
 “ *have loved you, that ye also love one another.*”
 Jo. xv. 12.

F. Repentence is another moral duty, strenu-
 ously insisted on by this Religion, and no other.
 For this alone can purge us from those transgres-
 sions, which we cannot be totally exempted from
 in this State of Trial (p. 76).

Ch. How can you tell us that Repentence alone
 can purge us from our transgressions, if the vica-
 rious sufferings of a superior Being are necessary to
 that purpose? as you say, (p. 29) And if Repen-
 tence will not cancel the old bonds, as you say
 (p. 112), you seem to be laying down a Creed for
 your Pupils before you know what it is your-
 self.

F. Repentence was never insisted on in any
 other Religion (p. 76).

Ch. I believe there never was any Religion in
 the World that did not actually require it, or con-
 sider it to be imply'd in their prayers and rites;
 though they might not speak of it in the same
 terms as are used among Christians.—In the Jewish

^a Gataker's Antonin. Prælog.

^b Lev. xix. 18. Deut. x. 19.

Religion we find it continually inculcated, and it is part of Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the Temple, that God would hear their prayers when they should repent. And all the sacrifices of the heathens were accompanied with penitential prayers; and the Koran adopts the same doctrine^a. The righteous, after they have committed a Crime, remember God, and ask pardon for their sins; for who forgiveth sins but God? And again, "^b God hath prepared forgiveness, and a great Reward for the Moslems of either sex." And Sallust the Philosopher, after telling us that by Virtue we approach to God, and by vice we estrange ourselves from him, adds, "If by prayers and sacrifices we gain forgiveness of our Sins, and worship God, and *make a change in ourselves*; by such a conduct, and our *turning to God*, we heal our Evils, and again enjoy the goodness of the Gods^c."

F. Faith is another duty of a species so new, that the Philosophers of Antiquity had no word expressive of the idea (p. 79).

Ch. I refer you to what has been already said upon that subject^d.

F. That this is a moral Duty appears from hence, that it is in a great degree voluntary;—for daily Experience shews us, that men not only pretend to, but actually believe, and disbelieve, almost any propositions, which best suit their interests or inclinations; and unfeignedly change their sincere opinions with their Situations and Circumstances (p. 82).

Ch. You can be no judge whether this change of opinions be *sincere* or not. For my own part, when I see men change backward and forward,

^a Sale's Koran, ch. vii. p. 51.

^b Ibid. ch. viii. p. 146.

^c Sallust, ch. xiv.

^d See p. 14. 15.

and constantly following their own apparent interests by such changes, my charity will not extend so far as to believe there is any honour or honesty in them.—And to your argument, I answer, that it certainly is in our own power to hear and digest the arguments in proof of any proposition, or to refuse to do it; yet, after hearing and digesting them, our Belief does not at all depend upon our Wills; but is involuntary, and follows the understanding. And if we wilfully shut our eyes against Evidence, we act the part of unrighteous judges.

F. Self-abasement is another moral duty inculcated by this Religion only, which requires us, among other things, to acknowledge that we can do nothing good by our own powers, unless assisted by God's over-ruling Influence; and to attribute even our virtues to his grace and favour (p. 83).

Ch. Every man must own, with gratitude and praise to God, that he receives from him all his powers; and consequently, that whatever he does, whether it be good or bad, is owing originally to that power which his Creator has conferr'd upon him. But to assert, under the pretence of self-abasement, that we have not as much power to do *well* as to do *ill*, is in effect to cast an ungrateful Reflection upon our Creator's bounty, as if he had given us no power but only to do mischief; which is contrary to Reason, Experience, and Fact; and to suppose that God will punish us for not doing well, when he has not given us the power to do well, is mere blasphemy.

F. Detachment from the world is another moral virtue, constituted by this Religion alone; so new, that even at this day few of its Professors can be persuaded that it is required, or that it is any Virtue at all (p. 85).

Ch.

Ch. What kind of a detachment from the world do you mean?

F. I mean such a one as is consistent with Industry, Labour, Chearfulness, and Hospitality; and the Acquisition of Wealth and Honours, if they can be obtained by honest means, and with a moderate degree of attention and care (p. 85).

Ch. I presume you would not deny to the Laity the same Kind of Detachment which you have allowed to the Bishops, viz. Titles and Palaces, and Revenues and Coaches (p. 150).

F. I only condemn such an unremitted anxiety and perpetual application, as engrosses our whole time and thought; and are forbidden, because they are incompatible with the spirit of this Religion, and must utterly disqualify us for the attainment of its great end (p. 86).

Ch. Such Virtue most certainly must be its own Reward! You have provided so magnificently, not only for the ambition of the young and healthy, but for the comfort and convenience of the old and gouty, that if those good managers you speak of (p. 137, 138), who choose to take a little of this world in their way to Heaven, are not contented with your Indulgences, they must have lost their understanding. What can a modest man wish for more than to be so *entirely detached* from the world, as to enjoy a life of chearfulness and hospitality, and the acquisition of wealth, and Titles and Palaces, and Revenues and Coaches? A man that can wish for more, will never deserve these.

F. This could make no part of the morality of pagans, because their Virtues were altogether connected with the business of this world, and consisted chiefly in conducting it with honour to themselves and benefit to the publick (p. 87).

Ch. Honour and publick benefit are very good things, without doubt.

F. But Christianity has a nobler object in view; and this is the celestial mansion of which we should never lose sight (p. 87); and a man must not expect to step into *this*, without a previous detachment from the business of this world (p. 86).

Ch. That Socrates had the heavenly mansion in view, I have already shewn from Plato's Phædon^a: and that he did not consider virtue as altogether connected with the business of this world, will appear from what follows: "The whole life of Philosophers, says he, is a meditation on Death; for what else do we, when we cast off our attention from sensual pleasure and all domestic concerns, those Servants of the body? When we detach our minds from publick business, and every kind of Embarrassment?—What is this, I say, but to call the soul home, to make it keep company with itself, and draw it off from the body as far as possible? Now to learn to abstract the soul from the body, is to learn to die. We ought therefore seriously to consider this, that, by disuniting ourselves from our bodies, we may render Death familiar to us. By which means we shall lead a *heavenly* life, even while on earth; and when the soul is freed from these fetters her flight will be the more speedy:" or, in other words, she may *step* into the celestial mansion more easily.

F. It cannot be denied, that the great author of the Christian institution first and singly ventured to oppose the chief Principles of pagan Virtue (p. 88).

Ch. It cannot be asserted, with any truth, that Christ or his apostles ever opposed any one of the chief Principles of pagan Virtue, either Piety to God, Justice and Charity to their neighbour, or Temperance and Sobriety in themselves.

^a Thoughts on Cic. 265. 305. Phædon of Plato.

F. The most celebrated Virtues of the ancients were, high spirit, intrepid courage, implacable resentment. *Impiger iracundus inexorabilis acer*, was the Portrait of the most illustrious Hero drawn by one of the first Poets of Antiquity (p. 88).

Ch. I remember we used to understand this passage, when I was at school, in the same manner as Mr. Francis has done; merely as a direction to the Poets, to maintain to every Person his proper character: but there is no accounting for difference in taste! The words of Francis, in translating this passage, are as follow:

If *Homer's* great *Achilles* tread the stage,
Intrepid, fierce, of unforgiving rage;
Like *Homer's* Hero, let him spurn all laws,
And by the sword alone assert his cause.
With untam'd fury let *Medea* glow,
And *Ino's* fears in ceaseless anguish flow.
From realm to realm her griefs let *Io* bear,
And sad *Orestes* rave in deep despair, &c.

Can you seriously believe, that these characters were hung out by Horace as models of pagan morality? If this had been what you was in search of, you should have consulted the words already quoted from that Satyrist ^a.

F. To all these admired qualities, those of a true Christian are exactly a Contrast, as appears from Mat. v. 39. "But I say unto you, resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other."

Ch. I entirely agree with you that *Christianity* enjoins constantly the Virtues of meekness, patience, and forgiveness. And you must be obliged to allow, from the several quotations I have made from the Heathen writers, that *their* morality did the

^a 2 Sat. vii. 81. quoted in p. 46, or Epist. Lib. I. Ep. i. line 23, &c.

same.

fame. But this did not oblige either Christian or Heathens, not to defend themselves from Injuries, as you yourself allow, page 63.

F. The chief object of the Heathens was immortal Fame; for this their Heroes fought, their Poets sung, and this was hung out by their Philosophers and Legislators as the great incitement to all noble and virtuous deeds.

Ch. I wish mankind could at this time of day be excited to noble and virtuous actions, by *that*, or any *other* motive. But whatever might affect the common people, or the ambitious; yet, if Cicero speaks the mind of the Philosophers, we find they had a nobler Principle. He tells us, that no deeds which arise merely from the love of Fame can be either Noble or Virtuous. But let us hear him speak for himself, for his Principles are always noble. Speaking of Heaven in the person of Scipio, he says, to Africanus, “ Had
“ you no hopes of returning to the place, where
“ great and good men enjoy all that their Souls
“ could wish: what would signify all human glory,
“ which can hardly endure for the small portion
“ of a single year?—Wherefore, if you desire to
“ entertain exalted Expectations, and to keep in
“ view *this eternal place of Residence*; let not the
“ discourse of the Vulgar make any impression
“ upon you, nor place your hopes in human re-
“ wards: Virtue alone, by her own proper charms,
“ ought to allure you to true honour. What
“ *others shall talk* of you; for talk they will, is
“ *their* concern, &c. ^a” And Marcus Aurelius
says, “ We ought to live satisfied with acting our
“ part well, and with the *inward Consciousness* of
“ having done so; without concern for the Repu-
“ tation of it; without witnesses; without catch-

^a Thoughts of Cic. 297.

“ing at, or wishing-for any external praise or
“glory from mankind.”

F. I will venture to affirm, that the most celebrated Virtues of the Pagans, are more inconsistent with the Spirit of Christianity, than even their most infamous vices; and that a Brutus wrenching vengeance out of the hands to whom alone it belongs, by murdering the oppressor of his Country; or a Cato murdering himself from an impatience of controul, leaves the world more unqualified for the Kingdom of Heaven, than even a Messalina or a Heliogabalus with all their Profligacy about them. (p. 92.)

Ch. I never met with any doubt, that Brutus thought he was engaged in a laudable action: and it seems to be thought so by many Christians at present. But while the matter is disputed both by Heathens and Christians, you can have no more right to call it a most celebrated Virtue of the *Pagans*, than of the *Christians*; whereas the Characters of *Heliogabalus* and *Messalina* were never approved of by either: That Cæsar had no more right to overturn the Liberties of Rome, and introduce arbitrary power, than any one has in *England*, to assassinate the King, and change the constitution to a Republick; is not to be questioned; and every man has a right to withstand such an attempt, by the death of the assassin. The *wrenching Vengeance out of the hand of God*, is only a flourish, and would have been just the same thing if *Cæsar* had been declared an Enemy of Rome, and suffered by the hands of the Executioner: the whole question turns upon *this*, whether the Conspirators had a *right to defend the Constitution in that particular manner*. And this is a question which relates in common both to Christians, Pagans, Jews, and Mahometans, and does not fall within the precepts of Christianity; (the case being never supposed or mentioned in the New Testament); but it is to be

be determined by the Laws of Reason and Nature. For in the natural Rights of mankind Christianity has made no kind of alteration. The Commands of Christ are for the most part general precepts to do what is just and right and becoming, and seldom enter into particular cases. The Laws of Nature and right Reason must be therefore consulted in all particular cases, that we may understand what it is that Justice and Rectitude require; and till this is known, the general command to act *justly* and *righteously*, cannot possibly operate. And so in this case, if it be asked, whether the act of Brutus was right or wrong; men will judge differently; even though they may all of them be desirous of acting as they ought. And if you are consistent with yourself, and allow of a resistance to Despotism; (as you seem to do, p. 63.) you must allow that the fault of Brutus (if it was a fault) consisted only in the *manner* in which the resistance was managed, and not in the *resistance* itself. But how this can be brought into a comparison with the profligacy of Heliogabalus and Messalina, who could not have the least conception that they were acting virtuously, and whose Profligacy all the world condemns, is difficult to conceive.

F. What will you say to the Suicide of Cato? Was not that esteemed to be a celebrated act of Virtue and Heroism?

Cb. The Death of Cato, I humbly conceive, was unworthy the *Courage* and *Prudence* of a great and good man, destructive to his country, and in flat contradiction to the opinions of the best and wisest of the heathen Philosophers, and particularly to the arguments of Socrates, laid before us in Plato's Phædon (the very book which he is said to have been just reading); which strongly insist upon it, that in whatever station we are placed, we should submit ourselves with patience and resignation to the Will

Will of God, till he should call us; in hopes of future happiness. — Cicero speaks in the same manner. “ You can have no admission into
 “ Heaven unless the God, whose Temple is all
 “ that vast expanse which you behold, shall free
 “ you from the fetters of the body ^a.” And again,
 “ It is your duty, and the duty of all who have
 “ any Veneration for the Gods, to preserve the
 “ union of the soul and body: nor without the
 “ express command of him, who gave you a soul,
 “ should the least thought be entertained of quit-
 “ ting human life, lest you seem to desert the post
 “ assigned to you by God himself.” And the Poets had the same opinion; as we find in the *Æneis* of Virgil.

Then Crowds succede who prodigal of breath,
 Themselves anticipate the doom of death.
 Though free from guilt they cast their lives away
 And sad and sullen meet the golden day.
 Oh! with what Joy the wretches now would bear
 Pain, toil, and woe, to breathe the vital air!
 In vain. By Fate for ever are they bound
 With dire *Avernus* and the Lake profound
 And Styx with nine wide channels roars around. }

But to speak ingenuously, even the Stoicks allowed of Suicide in some cases, looking upon the *circumstances themselves* to be a *proper* and *sufficient* call out of the world by God: and upon this ground it is allowed of by *Plato*; and the death of Cato is defended by Cicero. But why is this mistake to be appropriated to the Heathens? was not the suicide of Domnina and her daughter Bernice, and Prosdice, who drowned themselves to preserve their Chastity and Religion, looked upon by the Christians in the same light, and celebrated by the Antiochians and Greeks as a Mar-

^a Thoughts on Cic. 277.

tyrdom?—And what have you here to oppose to Reason but Reason? For though you assert pre-emptorily in your 3d proposition, that every moral precept founded on Reason, is carried to a higher degree of Perfection in Christianity than in any of the wisest Philosophers, you must be sensible, that many immoralities, and particularly such, as appear like suicide, to be contrary to the *Nature* as well as the *reason* of mankind, are never so much as mentioned by our Saviour; but we are left to our own Reason, and the Laws of Nature to guide and direct us^a.

F. Nothing I believe has so much contributed to corrupt the true Spirit of the Christian institution, as our partiality to the manners of the pagan antiquity; from whence we learn to adopt every moral Idea, that is repugnant to it, and to applaud the false Virtues which that disavows. (p. 92.)

Ch. I think there is scarce any argument that so thoroughly provokes us to love and to good works, as the thought of their noble and generous principles; how much better ought *we* to act to whom the will of God and our future hopes are more clearly revealed? But it is a strange thing to consider how the learned differ from you. Josephus, who was a Pharisee (the strictest Sect of the Jews), allows the doctrine of the Stoicks to have a great Resemblance to those of that Sect^b: and Jerom. says, in so many words, *Stoici nostro dogmati in plerisque concordant*^c. The Stoicks agree with our doctrine in most things, and Gataker, after giving us the maxims of the Stoicks, adds, “These maxims are perfectly agreeable to their principles, all holy, righteous, strict, and manly, all breathing piety, affection, humanity, and great-

^a See Euseb. Ecc. Hist. L. viii. c. 12. Chrysost. tom. i. Aug. de Civit. Dei, B. i. c. 26. ^b In Vita sua. ^c In Isai. Commen. cap. ii.

“ness of Soul^a.”—In short, I can hardly imagine it possible, for any man who had read the writings of Plato, Epictetus, Xenophon, Cicero, or Marcus Antoninus, to speak of them as you do. They are so full of the noblest sentiments of Virtue, and harmonise so amazingly with the Precepts of the Gospel, as Gataker has shewn in numberless instances, that our heart glows within us, as we read them: or, as he pathetically expresses it, “it pierces to the bottom of the heart, and leaves “the dart deep fixed in the Soul; this, every attentive Reader, says he, will perceive, and “every honest one will confess^b.”

F. But do they not teach us to applaud false Virtues, which Christianity disavows; and to be guided by the Laws of Honour, which Christianity abhors? (p. 92.)

Ch. For heaven’s sake, let us not take our definition of Honour from Villains, Fools and Madmen, and then think to palm it upon the world so defined, as an article of Pagan morality. The heathen moralists had no other notion of Honour but what Christianity approves of.

“There are indeed, as Mr. Dacier observes, “several learned men, who, whenever they speak “of the heathens, bear witness against themselves, “that they never *well* read them; and that they “have only an *imperfect* Idea of them: for they “impute such sentiments to them, as they never “had, and deny them others which they had in “reality; which is a great piece of injustice: nay, “it seems, if I may so speak, to diminish somewhat from the mercy and justice of God, not “to acknowledge all the testimonies he was pleased “to give of himself, among the Pagans in those “times, that were corrupted with the most

^a Præloq. ad Ant.

^b See Gataker’s Antoninus, Preface.

“abominable

“ abominable Idolatry, in order to reduce them
 “ to the true Religion.”

“ There is no true honour, says Cicero, either
 “ publick or private, but what is consistent with
 “ justice and probity. And that Courage, which
 “ is not governed by the Rules of Justice, or is
 “ directed to private end, is altogether blameable;
 “ and so far from being a part of true virtue, that
 “ it is indeed a piece of the most barbarous in-
 “ humanity ^a.”—Does Christianity any where deny
 this? whereas the Honour you speak of is nothing
 but the common cant of modern bravoës; who
 suppose Honour to consist in a savage fierceness,
 which defies a bullet, and the point of a sword,
 upon the same want of principle and sensibility, as
 they brave the gallows.—Even highwaymen may
 be true to one another, and call themselves men of
 honour. Levee, who was hanged in 1722, de-
 clared to the court upon his trial, that he and his
 comrades had too much *Honour*, to rob men of their
 cloaths, and they scorned it ^b.—But notwithstand-
 ing, men may deceive themselves with false notions
 of Honour. Honour herself remains as chaste and
 as unblemished as the Reputation of Juno, when
 Ixion embraced a cloud instead of the Goddess.

F. I insist upon it, that he who is actuated by
 a principle of Honour, though he may be virtuous
 and honest, and even *Religious*, cannot be a Chris-
 tian——I repeat it, a man whose ruling principle
 is honour, however *virtuous* he may be, cannot be
 a *Christian*. (p. 94.)

Ch. I can hardly imagine you to be in earnest:
 especially as you have used the word *Religious*.
 For if a Man of Honour may be of any Religion
 at all, why not a Christian? If you mean that
 Christianity requires that the Fear of God should
 be the Ruling Principle in a Christian; and there-

^a Offic. i. 19.

^b Select Trials.

fore a man cannot be a Christian, while his Ruling Principle is Honour; you should consider, that the Fear of God is the Ruling Principle in all *other* Religions; and is the very thing which constitutes an action to be *Religious*; and therefore, if you concluded that a man, whose Ruling Principle is Honour, can be of no Religion at all, we should have understood you: But to admit that he may be a religious man, and yet declare that he cannot be a Christian, is utterly unintelligible.

Bishop Hoadly, in his Sermon before the King, in 1736-7, says thus: “ And now, if I may conclude with a word more peculiarly proper to this *assembly*, and this *place* in which I now speak; I will add, that, if what I have been laying before you be the truth of God, of such importance as to be worthy of your attention; it cannot but be the immediate conclusion from the whole, in the breast of every person of *High Rank* here present, that a settled course of *Virtue* must be the only course of *Honour* to such a Being as man is: and that the more established any man is in this Course, the greater title he has to be called a *Man of Honour*. The word Honour still remains amongst us applied to the behaviour of Men; and if the ideas annexed to words be not yet intirely confounded, it can mean nothing distinct from, much less contrary to, *Virtue*. Nor are the differences of things yet so lost, but that the word is still designed, in all the instances of conduct and action in which it is used, to signify a degree of *Virtue* even exalted *above the common pitch*; and exercised in cases to which human Laws and human eyes often cannot reach, but the Right and Reason of the thing do: as in those of Gratitude to benefactors known only to ourselves; Truth to the most secret Promises; Justice and Equity *as such*, where no *Court*, and no man’s judgement can enforce it. These and many other instances shew

an acknowledgement, in those who use the word, of the strict obligation to Virtue as the dictate of the rational Faculty, and of the utter disagreeableness of the contrary to that secret principle in them, the power of which in some such instances they cannot forbear to feel and follow.

This is in effect to acknowledge, what is a most certain consequence, that a man of *Virtue* and a man of *Honour*, through the whole system of morality, are only two expressions for one and the same thing: and that it is a contradiction to the Nature of things, as well as the greatest abuse of Language, to put asunder what God and Reason have joined together.—And indeed what can be the *Honour* of *Man*, but that practice which is unvariably agreeable to his Superior and Ruling principle? Let him not claim any other, for fear he should be found to claim the *Honour* of lower animals instead of *his own*; and to boast of *that* in which many of the *irrational* kind, could they act in our world, would greatly excel him: for in *Men themselves* it requires but a very low capacity, and little more than inclination, free from the restraints of Reason and Reflexion, to be *dishonourably* wicked.”

F. The contrast between the Christian institutions and all others before Christianity, is sufficiently Evident. (p. 95.)

Ch. I have repeatedly proved, that there is no contrast between the moral institutions of the Christians and the Pagans. Piety, Justice, Faith in God, Resignation to the divine Will, were all preached up by the Heathens; and Christianity has never reprobated any of them; but, on the contrary, confirms the Law of Nature, which was written in the hearts both of the Heathens and the Christians.

F. The superiority of Christianity is not to be disputed, unless any one should undertake to prove that Humility is less amiable than Pride, or that—or that—(p. 95.)

Ch.

Ch. Nobody disputes its Superiority : but you have not shewn wherein that Superiority consists ; nor do you appear to be sensible of it. And you only deceive your Pupils, if you would persuade them to believe, that Pride, Turbulence, Revenge, Malignity, Fraud, Villany, Avarice, &c. were approved of in the Heathen Morality.

F. You must allow that a *real* Immortality is an object more rational, more worthy of pursuit, than an imaginary Immortality in the applause of men ; *That worthless Tribute* which the *folly* of one part of mankind pays to the *wickedness* of the other. (p. 96.)

Ch. I am tired of repeating so often the hopes of the Heathens after Death.—As to an imaginary Immortality in the applause of men, the virtuous Heathens despised it : and so do the virtuous Christians : except it should appear in a different Light than you have represented it. For when it proves to be the approbation which wise and good men pay to Rectitude ; I believe no man will despise it, who has Virtue enough to deserve it ; and in this sense, Tacitus says truly, *Contemptu Famæ, contemni Virtutem* : he who despises Fame, despises Virtue.

In short you have no way to prove that Christianity condemns the Virtues of the Heathen Morality, but by misrepresenting their Virtues or misinterpreting the Scriptures.

Conclusion.

F. If I mistake not, I have now fully established the truth of my three Propositions.

1st. That there is now extant, a book, intitled, the New Testament.

Ch. This was not only granted without any difficulty ; but the Apocalypse was added to your account of the books contained in it, which you seemed to have forgotten.

F. 2d. From this book may be extracted a System of Religion entirely new ; both in its object and its doctrines ; not only superior to, but totally unlike every thing which had ever before entered into the heart of man. (p. 97.)

Ch. As far as relates to the *Object* of the Christian Religion, and the *moral Doctrines* of the New Testament, it has been proved, that they were the same before Christianity, as since the Revelation was made ; and as to the particular doctrines of the Trinity, and the vicarious punishment of Christ, in the Sense in which you have explained them, they have been proved to be contradictory both to the Scripture, and to the divine Attributes.

F. My 3d Proposition was this ; that from the New Testament may be collected a System of Ethics, in which every moral precept founded on reason, is carried to a higher degree of purity and perfection, than in any other of the wisest Philosophers of preceding ages ; every moral precept founded on false principles totally omitted, and many new precepts added, peculiarly corresponding with the new object of this Religion. (p. 98.)

Ch. This third proposition, that every moral precept in the New Testament is carried to a higher degree of perfection and purity, than by the Philosophers ; is a contradiction to your second Proposition ; which asserts the doctrines to be totally unlike ; and such as never entered into the heart of man ; for according to what you now say, they only differed in degree.—But allowing that a system of Ethics may be collected from Scripture, in which every moral precept founded upon reason is carried to a greater degree of perfection than any other of the wisest philosophers of preceding ages ;—yet, what will this prove ? was not this case the very same among the Philosophers themselves ? did not every age improve upon the preceding

ceding one?—You must own with regard to Socrates, that morality was carried by him much nearer to perfection, than it was before. You allow that the wisest moralists of the wisest ages represented the desire of Revenge, as the mark of a noble mind (p. 68.); whereas Socrates declared, that it ought *never* to be practised; and how is it possible to carry this doctrine to a higher Perfection? Whence came this improvement in Ethics? not from a supernatural Revelation, but from Reason. And who can say that it might not have arisen in time to as high a perfection as the science in all moral Precepts is capable of? Who shall set bounds to another man's understanding in matters which are supposed to be allowed for truth, as soon as they are revealed? and venture to say, thus far shalt thou go and no farther? For you allow that the morals are intelligible to the meanest Capacities; how then, as I observed, can you suppose any improbability that they might be investigated by men of the highest capacities? I can't see, upon your principles, how any man who plainly perceives the moral precepts of Christianity to be true by his own Reason, can have any proof of Christianity at all.—And what honour or glory can accrue to God Almighty by depreciating a dispensation which lasted 4000 years, and still continues in a greater extent than Christianity; for the sake of exalting another, which is not nearly so extensive, and has not lasted near so long? The danger lies in this, that if the first of them is not defensible, the latter cannot be so.—Let us then so guard our sentiments and arguments as to defend them both, or we had better be silent.—As to the instances you have given of what you call precepts founded on false principles, you have not mentioned one that is so founded, but condemned such as are worthy of praise; as Friendship, Patriotism, and Honour.—And the new precepts you speak-of,

as peculiarly corresponding with the new object of Christianity (as you represent it), such as Poorneſs of Spirit, Faith, &c. were all of them looked upon as moral Duties by the Heathens: and conſequently this ſyſtem, both as to the object, and the precepts, which you would perſuade us was never thought of before, is nothing more than the precepts of natural Religion, which St. Paul ſpeaks of as written in the hearts of the heathens; and which Cicero, as well as the Chriſtian Moralists, allow to have derived its origin from God, by the operation of the underſtanding, given us for that purpoſe, and the ſame that exiſted before the firſt corruption of natural Religion.

F. The argument I am now uſing, is founded on the ſame Reaſoning, by which the material world is proved to be the work of an inviſible hand; viz. we view with admiration the Heavens and the Earth, and conclude, they cannot be the work of man, but muſt be the production of an inviſible Creator.—In the ſame manner, we ſee a ſcheme of Religion and Morality, unlike and ſuperior to all the ideas of the human mind, impoſſible to be diſcovered by the Knowledge, or to be invented by the artifice of man; and therefore we muſt conclude, that it muſt derive its origin from the ſame omnipotent and omniſcient Being, (p. 100.)

Cb. It is certainly true, that all our Notions of true Religion came originally from God; it was God, as Cicero ſays, who originally compoſed and promulged the Laws of Conſcience and right Reaſon. But it does not at all follow from thence, that the Laws of Conſcience, which we find in our breasts, were the effects of a particular external Revelation: and if they were derived from that Reaſon which God Almighty gave us to be our monitor and director, we are equally indebted for them to God Almighty, as if they had been diſcovered to us in any other manner. For to go on
with

with your own comparifon, when Almighty God had given to the different parts of the Creation their feveral Natures, and form'd the grafs yielding feed, and the trees yielding fruit after their kind; the effects, which were to be produced by thofe powers and properties, did not require any farther interpoſition of God to produce them: and in like manner the Underſtanding, with which mankind was originally indued, produced thoſe fruits, i. e. thoſe Improvements in morality, as well in every art and ſcience, for which it was originally given.

F. The Propagation of this Religion has not been leſs extraordinary than the Religion itſelf, or leſs above the reach of all human power, than the diſcovery of it was above all human Underſtanding. (p. 101.)

Ch. It is very true: and the Reason is given us by St. Mark, who tells us, that the Apoſtles went forth, and preached every where, the Lord *working* with them, and confirming the word with *Signs* following: “ And theſe *ſigns* ſhall follow them
“ that believe; in my Name ſhall they *caſt out*
“ *Devils*, they ſhall *ſpeak with new tongues*, they
“ ſhall *take up Serpents*, and if they drink any
“ *deadly thing* it ſhall not hurt them, they ſhall lay
“ *hands on the ſick* and they ſhall recover ^a.” Do you imagine theſe *ſigns* would have been wrought in proof of the Doctrines, if the Divinity of it had appeared in the doctrine itſelf? On the contrary, it is not likely that any more regard would have been paid to the doctrine if unattested by miracles, than to the Precepts of the moral Philoſophers.

F. It is well known, that in the courſe of a few Years, Chriſtianity ſpread over all the principal Parts of Aſia, and other places. This *Miracle* they undoubtedly performed. (p. 102.)

^a Mar. xvi. 17, &c.

Ch. If they had not performed such extraordinary Works, you might properly call it a Miracle to have met with such success; but it is a Miracle we should *never have heard of*. Whereas, when such Works were actually performed, the Miracle lay in the *performing them*; and not in the peoples believing what they saw.—You argue just as the Irish gentleman did, when his Friend had shot a bird at a great height.—Arrah! my dear Friend, but why did you spend your powder and shot: it must have been killed by the fall.

F. If any man can believe the Son of a Carpenter and twelve illiteral Mechanicks, unassisted by any supernatural Power, should be able to discover what had escaped the Penetration of Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero, &c. (p. 104.)

Ch. No one pretends that they were unassisted by a supernatural power in the Revelation of the Mediatorial Scheme, or in the Miracles performed in Proof of it. And no Christian, except yourself, ever pretended to prove the truth of the Mediatorial Scheme without the help of Prophecy or Miracles, or both. And as to the moral Precepts, they had been discovered by Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero, long before, as their works plainly prove.—But, if it were not so, yet, why should not the Son of a Carpenter, as you choose to express yourself, improve upon Socrates the Son of a Statuary; as Socrates, by your own confession, improved upon all the Philosophers who went before him?

F. If any one can believe that the Apostles would become Impostors for no other Purpose than the propagation of Truth; Villains for no other purpose than to teach Honesty, &c. (p. 105.)

Ch. This is all declamation, and you still harp upon the same mistake.—The Apostles were convinced by the miraculous works which were wrought in support of the mediatorial System,
and

and they delivered down the same truths to others, by the evidence of the same divine attestations: but they never attempted to prove the divinity of their doctrines by any internal marks in the doctrines themselves: and if they had attempted it, every man who had learned the same precepts before, in Plato or other philosophical Writings, must have looked upon them as Impostors.

F. But should these Infidels be all in the right, and this pretended Revelation be all a Fable, yet what harm would ensue from believing it? p. 107.

Cb. The practice of morality will certainly do us good, whether we believe the mediatorial Scheme or not. But if you make it an argument for believing the mediatorial scheme of Salvation by Christ, that it will do the Infidel no harm; you deceive both him and yourself.—No man can believe any thing, merely because it will do him no harm to believe it. Such a reason may beget Hypocrisy; but can never beget Faith:—What the Infidel stands in want of, is such a well-grounded assurance of the gospel truths, as shall be an effectual motive with him to a virtuous practice; for as to the moral duties, he knows them as well as you:—and you tell him the belief of the mediatorial Scheme will do him no harm. What assistance will this be to him? where is the Evidence to support this Faith? If he has no proof of its truth, Reason, as Lord Shaftesbury says, which knows the cheat, will never be satisfied on such a bottom ^a.

F. Is not Christianity the only principle that can retain men in a steady course of virtue, piety, and devotion, and support them in the hour of distress, sickness, and death? (p. 108.)

Cb. It is certainly an effectual principle, but not the *only* one; there is no necessity, because a man

^a On Enthusiasm, 36.

has never heard of Christ, or gives no credit to the *Gospel*, that he must therefore give up all hopes in the *God* of the Universe: no reason, because he has not the *assurances* of a *Christian*, that God will judge the world in Righteousness, that he should not believe it probable: no necessity, that he should distrust the universal goodness of God, because he does not believe the particular amazing instances of it which are reveled in the Scripture. Thus the Apostles argue, Acts xiv. 17. But let us appeal from Reason to Fact upon a very melancholy occasion. When the poison was brought to Socrates, which was to put an end to his life, he asked the servant, if he might not make a libation to the Gods: and being answered, that there was only enough for one dose: I understand you, says Socrates; but however, it is lawful and expedient, to pray to the Gods, that my voyage from hence to the place I am going to may be fortunate and happy: which I heartily do;—and saying this, he reached the cup without the least alteration or change of countenance, and drank it off with great tranquillity and chearfulness. Hitherto, says Phædon, we could scarcely refrain from tears; but when we saw him drinking and finishing the poison, we could hold no longer. The tears fell from me involuntarily in great abundance, so that covering my face, I lamented, not Him, but my own misfortune, in the loss of such a friend. And Crito, before me, not being able to contain himself, rose up: and Apollodorus, who had not ceased crying, now burst out, weeping and wailing in a manner that moved us all, except only Socrates; and he called out to us, What are you about my good friends? It was chiefly to avoid this improper behaviour, that I sent away the women, for I know we ought to die quietly and composed; be easy then, and act like men.—Soon after this, the Poison operated, and Crito closed his mouth and eyes. This, Echebrates,

Echecrates, was the end of our friend; the best man that we ever knew, as well as the most wise and just^a.—When we consider all this, and recollect his words in the 21st chapter, that “ it “ was to a wise and good God, to whom, if it “ should please God, his soul was immediately “ about to depart;” is there any appearance in this account, or in the whole of this great man’s conduct and character, that should tempt us to believe that he was not supported by Faith in God, in a steady course of virtue and piety, and even in the hour of death? But he himself has very fairly stated the advantage of the Christian over the Deist in the following words, when, speaking of the hopes of Immortality, he says, “ Amongst “ all human Reasons, we must take the best and “ most unanswerable; and trust to *that*, as to a “ *ship*, to sail through this tempestuous life; unless we could meet with a more *safe* conveyance “ in some *stouter* vessel, such as a *divine Revelation* would be^b.”

F. Whatever might be the operations of true Deism on the minds of the Pagan Philosophers, *that* can now avail us nothing (p. 109).

Ch. Why cannot true Deism have the same effect as it had formerly?

F. Because the Light which then lightened the Gentiles is now absorbed in the brighter illumination of the Gospel (p. 109).

Ch. I don’t well understand this language; but I suppose you mean, that the moral precepts of the heathens are included in the moral precepts of the Gospel: for as to the mediatorial scheme, it is what pure Deism is a stranger to.

F. I say we can form no rational system of Deism but what must be borrowed from the Gospel; and,

^a Phædon, xlix.

^c Ibid. xxiii. λογὴ θεῶν τινός.

as far as it reaches towards perfection, must be exactly the same.

Cb. Does not this entirely destroy your *second* proposition (that Christianity is totally *unlike* every thing that had before entered into the heart of man)? How can that be true, if Christianity contains the *same* precepts which were known to the heathens before Christianity?

F. I say, if we do not accept of Christianity, we can have no Religion at all.

Cb. I can see no such Consequence. Christianity, without doubt, contains in it not only the Religion of Nature or Deism, such as was the Religion of Socrates, Plato, Cicero, &c. but also the whole scheme of our salvation by Christ: and, if so, why may not a person believe the religion of nature, and yet not believe the *mediatorial scheme*? If it is certain, that the whole of natural Religion was believed by Tindal, Chubb, and many other modern Deists;—and if this, which they certainly can believe, without believing any thing more, can, agreeably to your system, be called Christianity;—every moral Deist must be a Christian: and your notion of Religion, as I suspected, upon your first setting out, without the foundation of a divine attestation, is nothing more, when canvassed to the bottom, but a confused new-fangled system of Deism; the mediatorial scheme being incapable of proof, as will further appear by and by; though I am far from imagining you are privy to it, because you seem to be so fully satisfied, in the face of so many absolute contradictions: so here you seem to make a compromise with the Deists, as you did before with the Polytheists.

F. That those who do not accept of Christianity can have no Religion at all, we may see plainly enough, if we observe that those who fly from Christianity scarce ever stop at Deism; but hasten
on,

on, with great alacrity, to a total rejection of all religious and moral principles whatever (p. 110).

Ch. You mistake the matter entirely. Bad men will throw off not only Christianity, but all moral Principles whatever. But this will never persuade me that the belief of Deism or natural Religion, which is founded upon the belief of a God who governs the world, has any tendency to make a man believe there is not a God who governs the world.

F. If I have now demonstrated the divine origin of the Christian Religion—no other arguments, however plausible, can disprove it.

Ch. This would be true, if you had indeed demonstrated it:—but *you* can have no right to *use this argument*, while you allow that there are many propositions contrary to reason which are demonstrably true (p. 160): for if a proposition can be true which contradicts our reason, we are no more certain of a truth after demonstration than we were before.

F. I was going to consider some objections to my argument; but I would previously observe, that the usual obstacle to our belief arises from our passions: we often disbelieve for want of inclination; and therefore the first step towards believing Revelation to be true, is to hope it to be so (p. 111).

Ch. If a man desires nothing more than to quiet his mind in this world, and make himself easy by the help of soporificks, he may perhaps do the business in some measure by encouraging such hopes as have no good foundation. But he that would found his Religion upon Truth, should banish as much as possible both *Hopes* and *Fears* in the Examination of it.

F. It is certainly for the Interest of all good men that its authority should be well founded (p. 111).

Ch.

Ch. It is so; but this would not be the case, if it declared to us that God punishes the innocent instead of the guilty.—However, for that very reason, because it is so much for the interest of all good men that its authority should be well-founded, I would examine it to the bottom, and be assured that it is built upon a Rock, that I might not be afraid to trust my eternal happiness upon it. But I would not depend upon arguments which are drawn from *Hopes* and *Fears*, or any of the passions; because I know that in the day of Trial all such confidence will fail us, and nothing will support us but a rational assurance upon the Testimony of God himself.

Objections.

F. We will now, if you please, consider some objections to the Christian Revelation.

Ch. With all my heart.

F. In the first place, some have struck at the root of all Revelation, by objecting that it is incredible, because unnecessary (p. 115).

Ch. And why do they imagine it to be unnecessary?

F. Because the reason which God has bestowed on mankind is, according to them, sufficiently able to discover all the religious and moral duties which he requires of them, if they would but attend to her precepts, and be guided by her admonitions.

F. That little word *IF* formerly convey'd a full answer to the menace of King Philip of Macedon, and it is of the greatest importance in this argument. For *IF* mankind should *not* attend to the dictates of Reason, *nor* be guided by her admonitions, then this whole objection falls to the ground, and a Revelation may be necessary to recover a knowledge of that religion and those duties, which, by not attending to the precepts of Reason

and her admonitions, had been lost in the world. And this is the true state of the case. There can be no doubt, if God design'd this world as a state of probation, or ever intended to judge the world in righteousness, that mankind were created capable of discovering all their duties; or, in other words, that nothing could be their duty but what their reason was capable of discovering to be so. But they had it in their power to pervert and misuse their Reason, as the Christians misuse and pervert both Reason and Revelation: and by this means they fell into such dangerous errors, that they were not able to recover themselves, without the assistance of a Revelation, which should awaken them by a voice from Heaven, or, in other words, by a message from God attested by Miracles, &c. and as this was the case, a Revelation seems to have been necessary to reinstate them in the knowledge they had lost.—But we have no reason upon this account to imagine, that they had not a very rational notion of natural Religion collected by the power of Reason, before they had suffered their Reasoning to be corrupted^a. Christianity itself has been as sadly corrupted, as ever natural Religion was: but the fault, in both cases, lies upon ourselves; not in our want of light, but in our preferring darkness; and our endeavours to keep one another in darkness, for some worldly advantage.—

F. To form a true judgment upon this subject, we should cast our eyes to those remote countries to which the supernatural assistance of divine Revelation has never extended, and we shall find men endowed with sense and reason not inferior to our own; so far from being capable of forming religious systems, that they are at this day totally incapable of making a nail or a hatchet (p. 116).

^a Ro. i. 20.

Cb. Does not your zeal against Reason carry you too far? Do you think Revelation necessary to make nails and hatchets? If not, you must allow what you seem so averse to, that one part of the world may make greater improvement than another, merely by use and experience, without an immediate Revelation.

F. What I say is, that Reason alone is not able to lead men to any degree of culture or civilization whatever; so far is it from being sufficient to offer to mankind a perfect Religion (p. 117).

Cb. Before men join'd in societies, they had nothing in view but how to preserve life; and at that time they were not likely to think of arts and sciences. But, even then, each of them made some improvement in his particular way of life, whether it was fishing, or hunting, or agriculture, &c. but it was no doubt a long time before they began to reason systematically upon morals.

F. These very improvements of culture and civilization uniformly flow'd from that great fountain of divine communication open'd in the East, in the earliest ages, and thence gradually diffused its salubrious streams throughout the various regions of the earth (p. 117).

Cb. It seems to me that the improvements in legislature, commerce, manufacture, painting, musick, grammar, or any of the arts and sciences, were neither brought to perfection by supernatural instruction, nor receiv'd their first rudiments from it. But when men began to make one common Fire, improvement in all knowledge followed very fast; and the knowledge of morals among the rest.

F. But the rise and progress of culture and cultivation (by surveying the history of the world) may be traced back to its source; and where these have not been able to penetrate, we find the human species are not at all emerged from their original ignorance and barbarity (p. 117).

Cb.

Ch. You do not argue fairly upon this question for when we find in the remote regions men who have any knowledge of Religion, you immediately tell us, that they receiv'd it from the great fountain of divine communication opened in the East (p. 117). As if no knowledge could be deriv'd from the human understanding in one place, because it was known before that time in another. You tell us, this knowledge may be traced back to its source; but this is nothing to the purpose: there is no doubt but you may trace back the whole race of men to Noah; but will you from thence conclude that all the common principles of mankind were derived from him? Should we not know that fire will burn, and that food is necessary to sustain life, or that twice two make four, or that the axioms in Euclid are true, without this communication from the East?

F. Human Reason may be capable of progression; but the *first foundations* must be laid in supernatural instructions (p. 18).

Ch. This every man *knows* must be a mistake. What a man sees by intuition, he is sure that he never receiv'd from *any instruction*, either from the East or West; but from his own mind. That the *power of seeing it* came from God, he is conscious; but he feels at the same time that it did not come from any external Communication. And it seems to be a most unaccountable fancy to suppose, that men should be able by their natural powers to build ships and palaces, to calculate eclipses, to explaine the laws of the Solar system, to make amazing improvements in all the arts and sciences, in some of which the ancients were entirely ignorant; and yet not be able by the same natural powers to apprehend the first principles of mechanics, arithmetick, geometry, the first rudiments of justice and humanity, or be able to make a nail or a hatchet, without a divine Revelation.

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But

But suppose it was true, that in Countries where there is no Iron they are not able to make nails or hatchets; yet where is there any country in the world, where there are not much greater instances of Ingenuity in many other particulars?—Had Dædalus a particular inspiration, when he invented the saw and the adz, and the auger? or did he receive them from other countries? History allows him to be the inventor; and they might be invented in an hundred places at different times; for it is Necessity that is the mother of invention: and there is no kind of difficulty in conceiving a number of different causes which shall make them known in some countries before others.

F. I say farther, that as Reason is incapable in its natural state of making any progress in knowledge, so, when furnished with materials by supernatural aid, if left to the guidance of her own wild imaginations, she falls into more gross errors, than her own native ignorance would have suggested (p. 120).

Ch. Is this said in defence of Christianity or of Deism? Sometimes you tell us, too much light blinds us, or that we see best by a few scattered Rays (p. 18). Then these Rays are collected into a rising Sun, which dispels the universal darkness (p. 47); and now this rising Sun only serves to light us into mischief. What can a Deist plead stronger for rejecting this new Light?

F. I only speak of Reason when left to the guidance of her own wild imaginations (p. 120).

Ch. You speak of Reason *furnished with materials by supernatural aid*; and what is this but *Revelation*? But what can you mean by Reason in her *natural* state? Is not Reason the same in *every* state? As to the wild imaginations you talk of, they are no appendages to Reason; but are the effects of fancy, caprice, or several other causes: you

you don't distinguish the distemper from the remedy.

F. How far such a guide is to be depended upon, in the important concern of Religion and Morals, I leave to the judgment of every considerate man to determine (p. 121).

Ch. Don't be too rash; but consider, that, if you reject Reason for your guide, you can get no other.—But are you not sensible that you have chosen an arbiter that is not able to determine the question?

F. How so?

Ch. You are arguing against Reason, and you leave the matter to be determined by the judgment of every considerate man: and what is he to judge by, except that very reason, which you reject as insufficient to the purpose? When a man reasons against reason, what satisfaction or assurance can he have of his conclusion?

F. How can it but be insufficient, when it has taught so many Errors?

Ch. You surprize me! What Errors has she taught?

Ch. She has taught some, that there is no God, and no difference between vice and virtue, and that to cut a man's throat and to relieve his necessities are equally meritorious (p. 120).

Ch. Are you sure that it was Reason that taught these strange notions? Passion may have taught them, or caprice, or folly; but Reason teaches the contrary: and I can hardly believe that she teaches the same thing to be both true and false. But however, if she teaches these things to be true, how do you know that they are not so?—Surely, you will not say by Revelation: for if Reason teaches, as you say, that there is no God, how should you know that there is one? and till you are assured of *that*, what dependence can you

have upon Revelation? But you shall determine the matter yourself.—When Alinda meets with Alphonso, in the Comedy of The Pilgrim, he asks her whether she lives in Segovia; and she gives him the following answer:

“ No, no, I dwell in Heaven;
 “ And I have a fine little house made of marmalet:
 “ And I am a lone woman, and I spin for St. Peter;
 “ And I have one thousand little children, and they
 “ sing Psalms to me.”

Now I would wish to know whether this speech favours of Reason or Insanity. Alphonso thought she was mad.

F. And so must every body.

Ch. Now I can't help thinking that the same *Reason* which taught somebody, that cutting a man's throat and relieving his necessity (except you mean that he was under the necessity of having his throat cut) were equally meritorious, was rather *more mad* than *Alinda*. But you mistake the matter: it is not Reason that teaches these Errors, but the defect of it, or Insanity.—Men there are, and have been in all ages, who shut their Eyes to Reason, and open them to Bigotry, Superstition, Self-conceit, Hypotheses, and a thousand other causes, which carry them into Conclusions contrary to Reason, and from which nothing but Reason can deliver them. Why then should you be such an enemy to Reason, and tell us that Reason is not to be depended upon (p. 121) in the important concerns of Religion and Morals? And (in page 120) that it has taught us many gross errors, *viz.* “ That
 “ there is no God, and no difference between vice
 “ and virtue,” &c. I wonder how it comes to pass, since Reason is so freakish, that so many Generations of men seem all of them to agree in the same *mathematical* truths; and that one does not prove the three angles of a triangle to be equal to *two* right angles, others to *three* right, and others to *four*;

four; or that a triangle may consist of four, five, or six (*Equilateral*) lines: is there no certainty in demonstration?

F. I am no Enemy to Reason; I only speak of *our* Reason. Do I not explaine myself, and tell you in p. 24, 48, and 169, that we *assent* to the Christian Doctrines, because we find them *agreable* to Reason; and in p. 181, that the story of Christianity is *improbable*, because it is *contradictory* to Reason? And have I not declared, that when I say the doctrines of Christianity are contradictory to Reason, I only mean that they are contradictory to *our* reason (p. 160)?

Ch. But when you tell us, that the doctrines of Christianity are *agreable* to Reason; and that the story of Christ is *improbable* because it is *contradictory* to Reason; and that Reason is not to be depended upon, and has taught us many Errors; do you not in all these places mean the *same* Reason; and also your *own* Reason? I can see no other meaning to your words than, that Reason *is*, and yet *is not*, to be depended upon. When you would prove that God is just, then reason must be *called* in, because you can prove it no otherwise. And when it is objected to your opinion, that it is inconsistent with justice to punish the innocent instead of the guilty, then Reason is to *be discarded*, and we are to believe contrary Reason. But I shall beg leave here, in defence of Reason, to refer you to the words of Socrates in Plato's Phædon^a; the words being very remarkable.

“ Let us be careful to avoid one Evil, lest we
“ be Reason-haters as some are Men-haters; for no
“ greater Evil can happen to a man than a hatred
“ of Reason.” And they both arise from the same cause: for misanthropy arises from our trusting other men without due circumspection, and after-

^a Cap. xxvii. 28.

“wards, upon finding ourselves frequently de-
 “ceiv’d and cheated, we contract a hatred to all
 “mankind: and thus, when a man unskilled in
 “*ατεχνος*, reasoning, imagines his reasoning to be
 “good, and afterwards finds it not to be so; some-
 “times true, and sometimes false, and this hap-
 “pens frequently; he begins at length to think
 “that there is not any thing certain, or any argu-
 “ment to be depended upon:—and, instead of
 “blaming himself, out of mere vexation, casts the
 “blame upon Reason, and rails at Reason all the
 “rest of his life; which deprives him of such
 “truths as are within his power to be well assured
 “of. What a sad case is this! Let us therefore
 “take care not to fancy there is no certainty in
 “Reasoning; but rather conclude that we are not
 “sane ourselves, and endeavour with all our might
 “to cure our own insanity.” I shall only add,
 that no man ever finds fault with Reason, unless he
 happens to have taken the wrong side of the
 question.

F. The highest state of cultivation among the
 Philosophers was never able to form a Religion
 comparable to Christianity (p. 122).

Ch. It is true; but, as I am often obliged to re-
 mark, you have no evidence for the truth of any
 part of Christianity, except the moral Precepts;
 all the rest depends upon a divine attestation.

F. All those sources of moral Virtue, such as
 truth, beauty, and the fitness of things, which
 modern Philosophers have endeavour’d to substi-
 tute in its stead, have never been effectual to pro-
 duce good men, &c.

Ch. There is no wonder that these notions have
 but little effect by *themselves*, when they are not
 joined with *Religion*. But I am afraid you have
 mistaken the case. It is true that many of the
 modern Christians have thought they employ’d
 their time very properly, in *shewing, that* in all
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the Laws of God *there is* a consistency and fitness *observable*, by which the order and regularity of his moral Government exhibits as much beauty, as the order and regularity of the material world; and this perhaps you may mistake, as if they *substituted* truth and beauty and fitness in the place of Religion. And why? Can you imagine that a wise and good God has no regard to the Fitness, Rectitude, and Truth of his actions in the Government of the World? or that it is not a great Encouragement to Virtue to shew that all the Laws of God are not mere arbitrary commands, but all of them consistent with one another, tending in their own nature to promote moral perfection and happiness, and the good of the universe?

F. Object. II. Others allege, That the Scriptures cannot be a revelation, because in them are found Errors and Inconsistencies, fabulous Stories, false Facts, and false Philosophy, which can never be deriv'd from [the fountain of wisdom and truth.

Ch. A heavy charge! But many things may appear erroneous, only by being seen in the mirror of ignorance. We may mistake figurative expressions for literal ones; parabolical accounts, and prophetical representations, for literal Histories; and in many cases we may not understand the subject. But how do you, as a Christian, account for these difficulties?

F. I account for them by observing, that the Scriptures are not the Revelation from God, but the history of it, delivered down by fallible men; and therefore the truth of it is not in the least affected by their fallibility, but depends upon the internal Evidence of its own supernatural Excellence (p. 123).

Ch. How can you pretend to judge of natural or supernatural Excellence, except by that very

Reason which you have so frequently discarded? It is in this blind manner that you have all along spoken on this subject. But, if you can produce any such internal evidence, it is high time to explain yourself, and distinguish the errors, and inconsistencies, the fabulous stories and false facts, and false philosophy, from the genuine Revelation; or, in other words, to shew wherein the Revelation differs from the history of it. Unless you do this, we don't know what you mean by Christianity, nor wherein its excellence consists.

F. You must certainly allow that every word in Scripture is not a divine Revelation. For example, in the Mosaick History the earth is supposed to be a plane, in which the author was mistaken: but this, I say, is no reason why he might not be a proper instrument in the hand of God to reveal his will to the Jews.

Ch. Without doubt: no man who has ever read his Bible^a can believe that all the prophets were better or wiser than other men. Common sense must inform us, that nothing more is requisite in a messenger than the faithful deliverance of his message. Moses was sent to *deliver* the Israelites, and not to lay down a system of Philosophy.

F. You will agree then, that in history, geography, astronomy, and philosophy, the messengers of God were no better instructed than others, and therefore were not less liable to be misled by the errors and prejudices of the times in which they lived (p. 130). They related Facts like honest men, to the best of their knowledge and information (p. 130); and recorded the divine lessons of their master with the utmost fidelity: but pretended to no infallibility, but sometimes differed in their relations, and sometimes disagreed in

^a See 1 Kings xiii. Jonah iv.

their sentiments, all which proves only that they did not write in combination to deceive. (p. 131.)

Ch. I am glad to hear you confess so much as you do: that they related facts like honest men, to the best of their knowledge.

F. Let us also suppose, that the accounts of Christ's temptation in the Wilderness, the Devils *taking refuge* in the herd of Swine, with several other narrations in the New Testament, frequently ridiculed by unbelievers, were all but stories accommodated to the ignorance or superstition of the Times or Countries, in which they were written; or pious Frauds, intended to impress on vulgar minds a higher Reverence of the Power and Sanctity of Christ.

Ch. When you speak of Christianity in this ludicrous manner, you put me in mind of an expression in Ovid, when Apollo put his hand upon the laurel into which his Daphne was transformed, and felt her heart still beating beneath the bark. The Poet's words are these, *Sentit adhuc trepidare novo sub cortice Pectus.* A plain proof, that the metamorphosis was not compleated; but the human nature still continued the same as it was before, only in a kind of masquerade dress.

I must beg leave therefore to ask you a question or two. 1st. Whether you think a man, who calls himself a Christian, can, with any consistency, ridicule the Scripture, merely because he meets there with some relations, which he does not understand, though at the same time he is not able to prove them either false or absurd: and though he might have seen them explained in such a manner as to satisfy many pious and sensible Christians^a?

2^d, Whether

^a The first of these difficulties may arise from what Maimonides observes to be very common in the Scripture; the representing the history of a Vision, as if it were the history of a Fact; as in Hosea (i. 3.) Gen. xv. Num. xxii. Jer. xxv. 15. xxvii. 2^d K. xxii. 19. &c.—The chief difficulty in the latter of these instances,

2d, Whether any man, let his Religion be what it will, can have a right to join in the ridicule, who has gravely informed us in print, that intermediate Beings may have the power to deceive, torment, or destroy us for their own pleasure or utility; that is, as the Children would say, for Fun.

I cannot pretend to determine, whether the learned author ^a I refer to, speaks only of Devils; or whether he means to take in the history of Fairies, Genii, Satyrs, Dæmons, or Hobgoblins, &c. so much famed in the works of the learned. But be that as it may: He, who can believe, that any of these intermediate Beings have the power to plague mankind merely for their *own Diversion*, seems to me to have as large a swallow as St. Jerom's Dragon, who could eat up sheep and oxen and shepherds, at a mouthful; and to have a faith more properly adapted to digest the stories of the pied Piper of Hammel, and the freaks of the merry Devil of Mascon, or the more sedate and sober one of Corduba, who was married 30 years to the abbess Magdalena Crucia (as we are told by Dr. Henry More from Wierus, &c.) than to think of ridiculing the Scripture, merely because he meets with some difficulties, which he is not able to explane. For my part, I can see no means of accounting for this seeming inconsistency in straining at a Gnat and swallowing a Camel, unless by attributing it to a kind of Revelation-quinsey, or

instances is, how to account rationally for the words of a mad-man, for such we may suppose this demoniack to have been. See Sykes on Demoniacs, and Farmer on the Temptation.

^a See a Free Inquiry into the Origin of Evil, p. 66, 67.— I would advise the learned author of this tract, that in his next edition of it, he would not found his proof upon analogy; because there is no *analogy* in this respect, between the power of rational Beings over *Brutes*; and their power over *one another*. But he will find proof enough of the power of Devils, &c. and their comical freaks and gambols, in the writings of the learned; such as Dr. H. More, Wierus, Remigius, Bodinus, &c.

to

to some other occult quality in the Recipient ; or else concluding, perhaps, with more certainty (as the ingenious Inquirer into the origin of Evil has set us the example) that it arises from an UNKNOWN CAUSE.

3d. To return to the book from this digression. I do not so much find fault with your objections to Christianity, as to your defence of it. If you were an open enemy, there would be no danger in your giving up the whole book of the Apocalypse, or any thing else which you do not understand.—The danger is, lest men should consider you as its *defender*, and trust to those idle suggestions of yours, which absolutely destroy the faith which they are brought in defence of ; though even at the expence of a self-contradiction. You suppose that the Evangelists *accommodated their accounts to the ignorance or superstition of the times, or that they were mean'd as pious frauds, intended to impose upon the vulgar, &c.* But how can you suppose this without contradicting your own words, that, *they related facts like honest men, to the best of their knowledge and information?* Can there be any *honesty* in imposing falsities upon mankind, as speaking *deceitfully* for God? It must be owned it has been a very common practice in the world among men of very respectable characters ; but it is no more defensible in Saints than in Sinners. And this supposition of yours, if well founded, would be the most flagrant instance of abominable *imposition* and *dishonesty* that can be conceived, even according to your own confession. For you ask, p. 105. Can any one believe that the Apostles should become impostors for no other purpose, but the propagation of Truth? Villains for no other purpose, than to teach honesty?—And yet you accuse them *here* of the very facts which you *there* condemn. What can we think of such a Christianity, as is supposed to be propagated in this manner?

or

or of such an accusation of the Evangelists, without the least offer at a proof? What can we believe of our Saviour's miracles, if we think such a Deceit *necessary*, to impose upon the vulgar a higher sense of his power and sanctity? What can we think of *Honour* and *Honesty*, if we imagine it to be consistent with such imposition? For my own part, if a man should hold such principles and yet make use of King Agrippa's words to St. Paul: Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian, Acts xxvi. 28. I should think the Christianity he held was of so strange and imperfect a nature, that I should be apt to answer as St. Paul did: *Would to God thou wast not almost, but altogether such.*

F. Why, supposing the Case to be as I have represented it: it would not in the least impeach the excellency of the Religion, or the authority of its Founder. (p. 126.)

Ch. Most certainly it would: what can we believe of a Revelation upon the Testimony of lying witnesses? The Scripture you say is not the Revelation of God, but the History of it: but where are we to find the Revelation, if not in the history? and if the history is false, what becomes of the Revelation?

F. We are not to understand the Scripture to be the word of God in such a sense, as if every part of this voluminous collection of historical, poetical, prophetical, theological, and moral writings, were dictated by the immediate influence of a divine Revelation. (p. 127.)

Ch. One would think you was describing the Statutes at large, and not a pocket volume. But be it large or small, if it be not all of it, the word of God, there is the more reason to distinguish carefully what is so from what is not.

F. There are a thousand occurrences related in the Scripture, of different importance, and some of

of none at all : and there are many things which prove the Apostles not to have been in common life under the perpetual influence of infallible inspiration.

Ch. In the common affairs of Life, they were not employed to instruct mankind : and it is ridiculous to suppose, that St. Paul might not leave his Cloak at Troas, as well as another man.

F. But they were undoubtedly directed by supernatural influence in all things necessary for the great Work they were appointed to perform (p. 129.)

Ch. It is true, they were so : but this is more than can be proved, without a divine attestation by miracles or prophecy. If the *honest* men, who wrote the history of the Revelation, have endeavoured to *impose* upon the world in their histories, the miracles they record may be all their *own inventions*, and you have no proof, that there was any great work which they were appointed to perform, or that there is a word of Truth in the whole Revelation.

F. I will venture to affirm, that, if any one could prove the prophecies to be only fortunate guesses, or artful applications, and the miracles there recorded no better than legendary Tales,—or that these books were impositions on illiterate and credulous ages,—it would only prove that God permitted his Revelation to be mixed with the ignorance of mankind, and to be corrupted by their frauds from its earliest Infancy ; as it has been from that day to this. (p. 131.)

Ch. I allow that men began very soon to corrupt the Doctrines of Christianity, long before any attempt was made to corrupt the New Testament. But it is not in your power to prove, that any corruption was made, or any falsities inserted in the Evangelical History, by those who wrote it. And whatever you may venture to affirm, you will never be

be able to evince (after giving up the Evidence you have mentioned) that any proof of Christianity (properly so called as distinct from natural Religion) will remain.

F. It does not follow, that a Religion is false, because it is mixed with frauds and errors of men. A diamond, though found in a bed of mud, is still a diamond, nor can the dust that surrounds it, depreciate its value, or destroy its lustre. (p. 133).

Ch. It is not the business of the Deists to prove Christianity to be false, but yours to prove it to be true: whereas you have left it in so unguarded a manner, that the whole of it may be fraud and error, for any thing you have proved to the contrary. You say a diamond, though found in a bed of mud, is still a diamond.—Is the New Testament that bed of mud with the diamond in it? I can understand you in no other sense. And if this be the case, tell us what you mean by the diamond, as distinct from the bed of mud; for the diamond must be of very little value that is not to be distinguished from the mud.

F. I have already said, that Faith means no more than the belief of one single proposition, that Christ was the Son of God; that is, in the language of those times, the Messiah, who was foretold by the Prophets, and expected by the Jews; who was sent into the world by God, to preach righteousness, judgment, and everlasting life, and to die as an atonement for the sins of mankind. This is all that Christ required to be believed.—He who does not believe this is not a Christian,—and he who does, believes the whole that is essential to his profession. (p. 80.)

Ch. If this is all that Christ requires us to believe, it is neither necessary to believe that God is sometimes *one* and sometimes *three*: nor that Christ was ever *punished* by him. But you are not able to prove even *this*, upon the supposition, that the
Prophecies

Prophecies are only fortunate guesses, and miracles legendary tales, and the Scriptures impositions on illiterate ages. How can you prove that Christ was the Son of God, or that the Messiah was ever foretold? or that Christ was an atonement for the Sins of the World, in any sense at all? There can be no internal Evidence to prove this, and, without the very evidence which you here suppose to be unnecessary, no kind of Evidence at all.

But you deceive yourself with your own comparison. The Diamond which would remain, after the evidence which you mention is destroyed, would not be Christianity, but natural Religion only. What was known to be true before Revelation was given, will be known to be true, after the evidence for the truth of Revelation is destroyed; and nothing more remain: so that all the Religion which you are able to support upon your Hypothesis, is only a new-fangled kind of Deism, or natural Religion, and the mediatorial Scheme is left to shift for itself, without any kind of proof at all.

F. Object. III. To some speculative and refined Observers, it has appeared incredible, that a wise and benevolent Creator should have constituted a World on one Plan, and a Religion on another; or reveled a Religion which should contradict the principal passions and inclinations he has implanted in our natures. (p. 133.)

Ch. Christianity does by no means contradict our principal passions and inclinations; but on the contrary, directs us to the proper use and enjoyment of them: and this was the proper business of Philosophy before the Christian Revelation.

F. Is not Christianity incompatible with the whole œconomy of the world? Is not the love of power, riches, and honour, and fame, the chief
excite-

excitements to great and generous actions, depreciated and discouraged by Christ? p. 134.

Cb. It must be a strange Religion indeed, that discourages great and generous actions; but you will never be able to fix such a Slur upon the doctrines of Christianity. The Love of power, riches, honour, and fame, are never disencouraged in the New Testament, unless when so far indulged as to excite to vice. And so our Saviour explains himself expressly with regard to riches. For having said at first, how hardly shall they who have riches enter into the Kingdom of God; and finding his disciples understand him as you seem to do; he explains himself in the next verse, and tells them, that he speaks of those only who should *trust* in riches.

F. Government we know is essential to the nature of man, and yet it cannot be carried on without some degree of violence, corruption, and imposition.

Cb. You may prove all the wickedness of the world to be necessary by this way of arguing.

F. Nations cannot subsist without war, nor war be carried on without rapine, desolation, and murder, yet all these are prohibited. (p. 134.)

Cb. Here again you assert without proof.—Socrates tells us, that wars arise from ignorance and injustice^a; and St. James, that they come from our Lusts; and will you venture to say, that God has so constituted the world, that they cannot subsist without indulging these Vices?—We shall presently see the fatal consequence of such a notion.

F. The non-resistance of Evil must also submit the individuals to continual oppressions: perpetual patience under insults, must every day provoke new ones: yet this is enjoined.

^a Plato's Alcibiades, 1.

Ch. You tell us the direct contrary, in p. 63. and say, “ Had Christ absolutely forbidden all resistance to the reigning powers, he had constituted a plan of Despotism, and made men slaves :” Now, if we may resist the reigning powers, we may certainly resist private injury.

F. A neglect of all we eat and drink and wear must put an end to all commerce; and yet this is recommended.—Now to all this, I can’t help answering thus: *such is indeed* the Christian Dispensation; *such* it is constantly declared to be by him who published it (p. 136.) in spite of those good managers, who choose to take a little of this world in their way to heaven. p. 137, 138.

Ch. You speak now in a very different manner from what you do in page 85 and 150. There you indulge us in all the innocent pleasures, comforts, and conveniences of life: titles, palaces, revenues, coaches, and every thing compatible with the spirit of Christianity. Whereas here you talk as weakly, as the good lady did, who complained to her minister (not perhaps in the very words I may use, but to the same purpose) that “ she found the scripture precepts *utterly* “ *incompatible* with the *Plan* of the human frame; “ for she had tried with all her might to comply “ with the words of Saint Paul, Pray without “ ceasing^a, and she found it absolutely impracticable.”—The minister easily settled her scruples, by observing, that in the adjoining verse we were commanded to rejoice evermore: therefore she should not depend upon detached Texts, but endeavour to understand the Scripture in such a manner that the whole should be consistent.—But if you are determined to interpret Scripture as this Lady did, what signifies nibbling at particular

^a 1 Th. v. 16, 17.

Doctrines? why do you not boldly venture upon the whole New Testament at once; and by the authority of St. Paul, assure us, that it was not by the *wisdom* of words that he was sent to preach the Gospel; for that God would (literally) destroy the *wisdom* of the wise; and bring to nothing the *understanding* of the prudent; p. 19. and that it was by the *foolishness* of preaching that God would save those that believe ^a: This would do your business at once, and lay a foundation for your whole System. But I beg pardon: I am afraid I grow too warm, and shall therefore return, to shew what a fatal consequence the Atheist draws from your concession of a double and opposite Plan: for it is the thought of *this*, that has disconcerted me and made me peevish. The Atheist argues thus; the Laws of Nature, by which all Beings are supposed to act, can only be collected from their particular inclinations and passions, and whatever seems to be conducive to their Being or Well-being. And consequently if they find themselves inclined to great and generous actions, and the Love of Power, honour, riches, and fame, are the chief excitements to them, and they find no check to the indulgence of this inclination from their consciences; they must imagine the indulgence of it to be agreeable to the Law of their Nature.—If *Government* is *essential* to the nature of man, and cannot be carried on without violence, corruption, and oppression, it follows that violence, corruption, and oppression, are included among their Laws of Nature. If nations cannot subsist without war; nor war be carried on without rapine, desolation, and murder; it follows that rapine, desolation, and murder, must be included among the Laws of their nature. If they have no hopes of any future state, or intimations of it, it cannot be their duty,

^a 1 Cor. i. 17. 19. 21.

or included within the Laws of their nature, to prepare for it. And if they have no notion of Piety, Faith, Resignation to the divine Will, contempt of the world; no sense of Religion or Virtue, except only such as consisted in the invention of Arts and feats of Arms; the Laws of their Nature must be supposed to be agreeable to this State of ignorance: and if the world is so constituted as to require a compliance with such practices, as Christianity has condemned; such as self-defence, a care of their families, a life of labour and commerce; these practices must come within the Laws of their nature. It is absurd to imagine, that a wise and consistent Being should expect them to act contrary to such things, whether they be called virtues or vices, which are essential to them as men, and without which they could not subsist. And to complete this plan, you inform us that man is by his Nature inclined to wickedness, and can do evil of himself, but can do no good, except by the particular interposition of God. Thus you have given us a Plan which you suppose to be the work of wisdom and goodness, which must unavoidably overwhelm the world in wickedness: and this Plan you suppose to continue for above 4000 years.

F. But God has since that given us another Law, which is directly opposite to our Nature; and that is Christianity.

Ch. To this the Atheist will reply, that if the first of these Plans was constituted by a wise and good God; the second cannot be proved to be so. Or if the second be wise and good, you must condemn the first: For it is impossible they should both come from perfect wisdom; because they lead to such different Ends; the one to Virtue and the other to Vice. Or if they could; how should mankind know which they were to follow of

these opposite Laws founded upon the same authority?

F. Let us hear then, how you get rid of this Objection, for it seems to be a very material one.

Ch. There can be no way of answering it upon the Supposition of two different and opposite Plans, but what must lead to Atheism.—But you yourself have answered it already ^a (though you seem here to have forgot it) by observing, “ That the present Life is a State of Probation and education to prepare us for another, and that this is the ONLY PLAN on which this world could possibly have been formed; and on this System, all that we here meet with, may be easily accounted for: for this mixture of happiness and misery, of Virtue and Vice, necessarily results from a State of Probation and Education; as probation implies trials, sufferings, and a capacity of offending: and education a propriety of Chastisements for those offences.”—What may be offered by the Atheist against this judicious sentiment of yours, shall be considered and answered where the Objection to it is urged ^b.

F. However, it appears to me, that all other institutions and morals were made for this world: but the characteristick of this is, to be against it; and therefore the merits of the Christian doctrines are not to be weighed in the Scales of public Utility, *like those of moral precepts*, because worldly Utility is not the end of the Christian dispensation, (p. 140.)

Ch. I cannot help digressing here for a few moments, till I make some observations upon *your* notion of *morality*, which seems to me to be destructive to all *public Faith* and *Honesty*. Morality most certainly was not designed to teach Navigation or Merchandise, or to aggrandise ourselves

^a Page 24, 25, 26.

^b See the VI. Objection,

in this world ; but it was designed to be the rule of action not only in this world, but through the Universe. “ It is more ancient, says Cicero, than “ the origin of nations, and coeval with that God, “ who governs heaven and earth : for it is im- “ possible that the divine mind should exist with- “ out reason ; and divine Reason must necessarily “ be possessed of a power of determining what is “ virtuous and what is vitious. Nothing can su- “ percede this Law, nothing retrench it or make “ it void. It differs nothing at Rome from what “ it is at Athens, nor is it any other at present “ than what it will be hereafter : it is an eternal “ and immutable Law, that is universally binding “ over all nations and at all times. And hence “ it is that God becomes as it were the common “ Instructor and Governor of the world.”

This is more strictly true than is generally observed. For if it was not for this Law written in our hearts, there could be no communication between God and Man even by Revelation ; because there would be no common Language between them ; if I may so speak.—We cannot be ignorant that when the Sacred Writers speak of Justice, Mercy, or any other moral Virtues, they do not specify their proper *boundaries* : and yet the proper boundaries must be fixed some how or other, because even our Virtues, if not properly regulated, will degenerate into Vices.—In other places of Scripture we find the duties expressed in such general terms, that they seem, if literally understood, to contradict one another ; *e. g.* Blessed are they that mourn, seems to contradict the precept, Rejoyce ever more.—Let your light so shine before men, &c. seems to contradict the words, Take heed that you do not your alms before men to be seen by them.—Now these and such like can no otherwise be understood but by consulting the Monitor within our own breasts ; and if, on doing

so, we did not find our own Reason supplied what was wanting to make these Texts *explicit* and *consistent*; the Revelation would be as unintelligible as if it was given in an unknown tongue.

It is farther observable, that this Law, written in the heart, is the *foundation* of *moral agency*. And if we were not conscious, *prior* to all revealed Law, that obedience is due to right Reason, and consequently to a revealed Law founded on Reason, Ten thousand Laws, with the strictest penalties, would not beget one act of morality or virtue. Almighty God has therefore inscribed it in the breast of all mankind, and when they found it there, they called it *Conscience*. However, it is on the virtuous only, that this Conscience has the Power of a Law: on the wicked, as Cicero observes, it makes little impression.—Now, as he who founds the Law or Rule of his Conduct on private Utility, instead of Conscience, encourages private Villainy; so he that founds it on publick Utility, instead of Conscience, encourages publick Villainy: for publick Utility gives no more Right to do an unjust action, or to inflict injuries, than private Utility does. It is the first consideration, with every good man, and consequently the foundation of his moral Conduct; not whether an action tends to publick or private Utility; but whether it be right or wrong: not whether it agrees with worldly Prudence, but with Conscience; which is a much safer and shorter Rule: and the common people, who seldom think of any thing so distant, as publick Utility, can have no other: Nor can the wisest men have any safer; their unjust actions under the appearance of publick Utility, being frequently turned, by the justice of an over-ruling Providence, to their prejudice and loss.—Who can help applauding the action of Fabritius, in the war with Pyrrhus; when a deserter from that King offered to dispatch him by Poison? But Fabritius, instead
of

of acting by the appearance of publick Utility, sent him back to Pyrrhus, with a discovery of the Treason: which action had the approbation of the Senate^a. Please to go on with your argument.

F. I say that worldly utility is not the end of the Christian dispensation; and this appears beyond dispute from the professed Incompatibility of Christianity, with the little wretched and iniquitous business of the world. (p. 140.)

Ch. You say true: but there is no occasion to admit that Morality is founded on publick Utility, or that there are two opposite plans of Providence to arrive at this Truth.—Both Reason and Revelation agree in disproving every thing that is iniquitous or dishonourable.

F. This very incompatibility of Christianity, with the little iniquitous business of this world, is so far from being a defect in this Religion, that, was there no other proof of its divine origin, this I think would be abundantly sufficient.

Ch. It is a proof that Christianity agrees with, and confirms, the Law of Nature: but it can prove nothing more. The Morality of Socrates, Cicero, &c. was adverse to the vain pursuits of this world, and condemned all the little wretched iniquitous business of it, as well as Christianity does.—And you yourself confess, that we are taught the same lesson by Reason, wisdom, and experience (p. 114.) Is not this a plain confession that they may be derived from a human Origin?

I shall venture to add further, that there are some, and I believe many men, who find the moral precepts of the Gospel so perfectly agreeable to their own feelings, that they wonder how an external revelation can be thought necessary to make them known: which notion seems to agree

^a Thoughts of Cic. 151.

with the words of Christ, Lu. xii. 57, "Yea, and
 "why even of yourselves judge ye not what is
 "right?" But others seem to think of them as
 an ignorant Indian would of the prediction of an
Eclipse, that it is something beyond the reach of
 human Reason, and could only be known by Re-
 velation. As if every man was not taught by his
 own Reason that he has no right to rob or murder
 his neighbour;—and upon this slender Twig de-
 pends your Christianity.

F. The great Plan and benevolent design of
 this dispensation was planely this; to enlighten the
 minds, purify the religion, and amend the morals
 of mankind in general, and to select the most me-
 ritorious of them to be successively transplanted
 into the Kingdom of Heaven (p. 142).

Ch. And what inconsistency is there in this plan
 to a resistance of injuries, or a just war of self-
 defence, or a prudent care of our families, or the
 possession of more than one Coat, or a life of com-
 merce and industry, or a care of what we eat and
 drink? &c.

F. There is no doubt, if this Religion was uni-
 versally accepted, and men observed strictly every
 precept of the Gospel, the face of human affairs
 and the œconomy of the world would indeed be
 greatly changed; but surely they would be
 changed for the better, and we should enjoy much
 more happiness even here than at present (p. 143).

Ch. And does not this prove that Christianity
 was design'd for this world, as well as the next;
 and that God does not act upon two different and
 opposite Plans, but the whole of his Providence is
 consistent, and tends to promote virtue and hap-
 piness? And therefore I can't help wondering how
 Christianity could appear to speculative men and
 refin'd observers to be such a strange thing. Is it
 such a strange thing that it should be part of the
 original Plan of a State of Probation and Improve-
 ment;

ment; that, instead of *making* us angels, God should have put it into our own power to *become* such? or that, in order to accomplish that purpose, he should instruct us in a Religion constituted upon a plan, which we find to be agreeable to Reason, wisdom, experience, and, if observ'd, would amend our Errors, and teach us to govern our passions, and in short promote more happiness, *even in this world, than could be produced by any other means?* Is this the Hobgoblin that affrighted these *refined observers*, under the appearance of a world constituted on *one* plan, and a Religion on *another*? Is it such a strange thing that a Physician should prescribe cooling medicine to a man in a fever, or——

F. Don't be so sanguine upon the subject. For though the gracious *offer* of Christianity was tendered to *all* men, yet the *universal acceptance* of it could never have been any part of the design of Providence (p. 144).

Ch. You suppose then, that God Almighty tendered the gracious offer to many, though he did not design they should all of them accept of it: Why then did he offer it to them?

F. It was foreknown and foretold by him who made the offer, that few, very few, would accept of it on the terms proposed (p. 144).

Ch. His *foreknowledge* that they would not accept of it, is no proof that he *designed* they should not accept of it. If this had been his design, he would never have made them the offer. Would not any man of common honesty be ashamed to be taxed with such a duplicity in his conduct as this must be?

F. It is thus we see [and are able to conclude] that this wonderful dispensation has answered all the Purposes for which it was design'd;—*viz.* that the enlightning the minds of men, was not to *reach* beyond a *very few*, though it was *offered* to
all

all (p. 145). And accordingly we find that care was taken, by the obscurity of the Revelation, that very few should be benefited by it (p. 157).

Ch. If this be the way in which you chuse to represent the matter, instead of answering the objection of the Atheist, you allow of it in its full force;—and instead of proving that God intended by the Christian Revelation the general Amendment and Salvation of all, who should be willing to receive it, you seem to imagine that he has purposely placed obstacles in the way, to prevent its progress. And thus the noblest of all schemes, that were ever devised, in which the happiness of all the families of the earth was included, is reduced to the benefit of a few individuals: and all this is brought about, by a pretended necessity, as we shall presently find, which arises from an UNKNOWN CAUSE; by which the power and goodness of God is restrain'd and over-ruled; and he is represented as making an offer of Grace, to all men in general, which he knew, upon account of this *necessity*, he was not able to make good. Is this a defence of Atheism, or Deism, or Demonism? I am sure it is no defence of Christianity.

F. Obj. IV. Others have said, that if this Revelation had come from God, his infinite power and goodness would never have suffered it to be so soon perverted from its original Purity, to have continued in a state of Corruption through the course of so many ages, and to prove so ineffectual to the Reformation of Mankind (p. 146).

Ch. We have no reason to believe that it was not as proper that mankind should be in a state of Probation in respect of *this Revelation*, and their behaviour under it, as when under the guidance of *Reason only*, which has been as much abused as Revelation. But what do you answer?

F.

F. I answer, that all this corruption, &c. will upon examination be found *inevitable*, from the nature of all Revelations communicated to so *imperfect* a creature as man, and the circumstances peculiar to the rise and progress of Christianity in particular (p. 147).

Ch. But you are not able to prove that the perverting Revelation from its original purity was more *inevitable* than any *other sin*; notwithstanding it has happened under all dispensations.

F. Is it not a fact, that the converts could not be persuaded to leave their old superstitions, but mixed them with Christianity, which their Philosophers also corrupted by Philosophy, &c. and do not you plainly see from hence, that this corruption could not be help'd without a total alteration of human Nature (p. 149)?

Ch. I can see nothing at all of this necessity. You give us an account of what happened, and from thence conclude that those things were inevitable; which is a kind of Logick one is not used to. The business of the primitive Christians was to have preserved the Christian Revelation *pure* and *unmixed* with Error. And it was no more necessary for *them* to corrupt Christianity by introducing and intermixing the doctrines of men with it, than it would be in *our* Governors of the Church, knowingly and wittingly, to continue the same Corruptions.

F. However we find, that the greatest enormities that can be well conceiv'd, vanished at the approach of Christianity; and to such an amazing degree of piety, charity, temperance, patience, and resignation, were the primitive converts exalted, that they seem literally to have been regenerated (p. 155).

Ch. Whatever might be the virtues of the primitive Christians, we know that the mystery of Iniquity began to work in the Apostles time,
2 Thess.

2 Theff. ii. 7. though *not* among the Evangelists, as *you* suppose.—And there has been as much falsity and inhumanity practised in Christian, as in Heathen, Rome.—St. John saw it in vision, and was so far from seeing any *necessity* for it, that he *wondered* with great admiration, Rev. xvii. 6. The Fathers of the church were witnesses to it, and have given us a sad account of the wickedness, not of the *times* only, but of the *church*.

F. Yet Christianity, notwithstanding all impediments, has certainly done a great deal towards diminishing the vices and correcting the dispositions of mankind (p. 156).

Ch. That the world has been much reformed by the Christian Revelation I allow, and that Christian Principles work unseen and unobserved like leaven. But if a total Reformation was design'd by it, the purpose has not yet been answered: but this was not owing to any thing that God Almighty has done to prevent it; but entirely to the perverseness of man, who would not be reformed: and therefore I rather imagine that what Christ suffered for mankind, in his humiliation and entire resignation to the will of God, will be of much greater effect towards the Salvation of the world in general than what he then preached. It was by his sufferings that he gained to himself those *powers*, by which he *became* a *Prince* and a *Saviour*: and there are millions who never heard of him as a prophet, nor of any part of his Revelation, who will be brought to happiness by him as a *Saviour*, when he shall come to judge the world in Righteousness. And *then* shall the Reformation of the world be completed, which at his *first* coming was but begun: and he shall restore the “long lost Truth.”—And I am the more confirmed in this, when I consider, that no man will receive eternal Life as an *adequate reward* of his obedience

dience to the doctrines which Christ has reveled, but merely as a *free Gift* which Christ, as a *Prince* and a *Saviour*, has the power to *bestow* on whom he will.

F. You may add another reason why the world was not designed to be totally reformed by Christianity, which is this, that, if it was universally adopted in belief and practice, it would totally eradicate both Sin and Punishment (p. 156). And it seems to have been to prevent this, that Christianity, as I observ'd, was reveled so obscurely (p. 157).

Ch. You amaze me! Would not a deliverance from Sin and Punishment be the greatest happiness that could be wished for?

F. It would certainly. But they are so necessary, that they can no more be eradicated than they could be prevented (p. 157).

Ch. If they could not be prevented, there could be no danger that Christ should eradicate them by delivering his doctrine plainly: Do you imagine that Christ spake obscurely, in order to prevent an Eradication of that Sin and Punishment, which it was impossible to eradicate?

F. I mean that an universal Exemption from Sin and Punishment was provided against in the Christian Revelation, because it is utterly repugnant to the universal system, and that constitution of things which infinite wisdom has thought proper to adopt (p. 159).

Ch. You seem to mean that God provided in the Christian Religion *against an Exemption* from Sin and Punishment; because he had so constituted things *before*, that there *could be no exemption* from them. If this be your meaning, what occasion could there be to provide against them by "the reserve and obscurity" with which you say the Religion was promulgated (p. 157)?

F. If

F. If Sin and Punishment did not arise from some *necessity*, to us *unknown*, they would never be permitted to exist at all. And therefore, to extirpate them, would be incompatible with the frame and constitution of the world (p. 157. 159).

Cb. I do not perfectly apprehend you yet: Do you suppose any *necessity* for Sin and Punishment *prior* to the will of God, and *independent* of it? If so, he *could not* have prevented it, and the infinite Wisdom of God (p. 159) is out of the question:—But if you mean that the necessity depends upon his *Will*, he certainly could have prevented it. There is no other necessity for sin, but what proceeds from the misuse of free-will and a violation of duty. And if you mean that Sin and Punishment are the necessary consequence of such a misuse, this can be no Reason why Christianity should be reveled in an obscure, but rather in a very plain manner, and be extended as far as possible; because the misuse of free-will would thereby be greatly restrain'd, and consequently the punishment of it. If you mean any other necessity for Sin and Punishment, it is all a mere chimera. If you suppose, as some^a have done, that a *particular quantity* of Evil must necessarily exist in the world, nobody knows *why*, it seems to follow, that Revelation can be of no *benefit* to mankind, because whatever is gained by it in *one* place, must be lost in *another*; and every moral *good* be balanced by an equal quantity of moral *Evil*.—If this be true, the greatest friend to mankind must be the greatest villain; because the more Evil and Punishment he appropriates to himself, the less quantity remains to be divided among the rest of mankind.—But whatever Cause you assign for the *necessity* of Evil, it must be a direct contradiction to what you advance a few pages farther (p. 173), that “God

^a An Enquiry into the Origin of Evil.

“ might have made the material world a system of
 “ perfect beauty and regularity, without Evils, and
 “ without Remedies; and the Christian dispensa-
 “ tion a scheme only of moral Virtue, productive
 “ of Happiness, without the intervention of any
 “ atonement or mediation. God might have
 “ exempted our bodies from diseases and our
 “ minds from all depravity,” &c.

F. But does it not appear that the Revelation was made obscure to the multitude and intelligible to the disciples only, agreeably to what our Saviour says, “ Strait is the gate and narrow is the way
 “ that leads to life, and few there be that find
 “ it?” (p. 144) Mat. vii. 4.

Ch. You seem then to imagine that Christ came into the world to revele the will of God to man, in order to improve them in Virtue; and then concealed his doctrine in obscure words for fear the effect should be too general. It is a great pity St. Paul knew nothing of this secret business. It would have saved him a sad mistake in his Epistle to Timothy; for there he says, “ This is good
 “ and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour,
 “ who will have ALL men to be saved, and to
 “ come to the knowledge of the Truth ^a”—And St. John the Evangelist knew no more of this wise constitution of things than St. Paul; but says, God sent his son into the world, that *the world* through him should be saved ^b. And St. Peter falls into the same mistake, and tells us, the Lord is not willing that ANY should perish, but that ALL should come to Repentence ^c. Is not all this point-black against your Hypothesis?

F. But does not Christ tell us expressly that he spake in Parables merely, that he might not convert the people, but only the disciples? “ To you
 “ it is given to know the mystery of the King-

^a 1 Tim. ii. 3, 4.

^b Jo. iii. 17.

^c 2 Pet. iii. 9.

“ dom

“ dom of God, but to them that are *without* all
 “ these things are done in Parables, that seeing
 “ they may see and not perceive, and hearing
 “ they may hear and not understand: lest at any
 “ time they should be converted, and their sins
 “ should be forgiven them ^a.” (p. 158)

Cb. The Scripture declares, that the people closed their own eyes lest they should be converted, and that Christ punished them for their perverseness, by speaking in a manner that was understood only by those who were desirous of instruction, according to his direction to his disciples, Mat. vii. 6. “ Give not that which is holy to the
 “ dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine,
 “ lest they trample them under their feet, and turn
 “ again and rend you.”—And it is plain from other texts that they watched an advantage to entangle him in his talk, whereas a parable gave no such advantage, Mat. xxii. 15.—The words here used of their closing their eyes, shews that their grossness and dulness and blindness was the effect of their own obstinacy. But the speaking in parables was so far from being intended to prevent a great number from coming to the knowledge of the Truth, that we find St. Paul uses the same words upon the Jews rejecting the offers of Salvation, with this remarkable conclusion, which is inconsistent with your hypothesis; “ Be it
 “ known therefore unto you that the salvation of
 “ God is sent unto the Gentiles, and they will
 “ hear it ^b.” And this agrees with the Prophecy of Isaiah; “ It is a light thing that thou shouldst
 “ be my servant to raise up the Tribes of Jacob,
 “ and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also
 “ give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou
 “ mayst be my salvation unto the *end of the*
 “ *Earth*,” Is. xlix. 6,

^a Mar. iv. 11, 12, Mat. xiii. 14.

^b Acts xxviii. 28.

F. Obj. V. Other objections have been raised to the divine Authority of Christianity, from the incredibility of some of its doctrines; particularly of those concerning the Trinity, and atonement for sin by the suffering and death of Christ: the one contradicting all the Principles of human Reason, the other all Ideas of divine Justice (p. 159).

Ch. Your explanation of these doctrines may contradict both Reason and Justice: but the doctrines as they lie in the Scripture, uncorrupted with human glosses, contradict neither. But if they appear to you to do so, how can you believe them?

F. Because an argument, founded on Principles which we cannot comprehend, cannot possibly disprove a Proposition already proved upon Principles which we do comprehend (p. 159).

Ch. This is a Reason why you should *not* believe them in the sense you do. For the principles of Reason and Justice, which they contradict, are what you *do* comprehend; and what agrees with them should therefore be believed.—The arguments on the other side, to prove that God is sometimes one and sometimes three, and that it is just to punish the innocent instead of the guilty, you do *not*, and *cannot* comprehend, and therefore ought not to rely upon them.

F. That three Beings should be one Being, is a proposition which certainly contradicts Reason, that is, *our* reason; but it does not follow from thence that it cannot be true (p. 160).

Ch. But it follows that we cannot *believe* it to be true; and we have nothing to do with the Faith of other men.—*Credat Judæus Apella, non ego.*—Why do we believe a God, but because it agrees with *our* Reason?

F. Are there not many Propositions which contradict our Reason, and yet are demonstrably true?

Cb. What do you mean by demonstration, but the shewing a proposition to be agreeable to Reason? And if so, the demonstration of a proposition which contradicts our Reason, must be a proof that the same Proposition is both true and false; and therefore, I deny the Fact.—And beg leave to observe, that this is the most dangerous of all Sceptical Principles, and plucks up by the roots both Reason and Revelation. If our faculties are not true, and able to judge truly of what they distinctly and clearly perceive, we cannot be capable of any certainty in the clearest inferences we can make, but must doubt of every thing.

F. You say then, that there is no one Proposition which contradicts our Reason, and yet is demonstrably true. I will give you several instances.

Cb. You will very much surprize me if you do. But I hope you will not think of palming upon me such palpable falsehoods, under the name of Demonstrations, as we sometimes find in the works of the learned. If you think of demonstrating “the contiguous sides of a Parallelogram to be
“equal to one another; that a steeple is not so
“high as a mushroom; that the moon and earth
“are so near, that your hand will not go betwixt
“them; that rounds and squares are all one
“figure; and that the clearest day is as dark as
“the blackest night^a,” with other pretty fancies of the same kind: I shall look upon it all as child’s play. But if you have any thing worth examining, I should be glad to hear it.

F. Most certainly I have; and the first instance I shall give relates to the being of a God; “That
“any thing should exist *without a cause*, or that
“any thing should be the *cause* of its own *Existence*, are propositions equally contradictory; yet

^a Dr. H. More’s Antidote against Atheism, ch. iv.

“ one of them must be true, or else nothing could have existed.” (p. 160)

Ch. Let us examine these two Propositions. First you say, it is contrary to Reason to suppose that any thing exists *without a Cause*; and this relates to the supreme Being.

F. I do so.

Ch. And you allow there must be a First Cause, or else nothing could have existed.

F. I do.

Ch. Your difficulty then seems to be this: How the First Cause (God) could exist without a prior Cause to produce it? And your question includes two manifest contradictions: First, you ask how a first cause can exist, except another cause existed before it? This must be your difficulty, because you speak of God. Whereas it is absolutely impossible that a First Cause should exist, if another cause existed before it.—Your second contradiction is, how the first cause, which *never was produced*, should exist without a cause to *produce it*. For here you speak of God.

F. Most certainly I do.

Ch. You speak then of a Being who never did begin to exist; and you are not able to conceive how a Being who never did begin to exist should begin to exist without a cause. Whereas you can have no reason to imagine that a Being who did *not* receive his existence from *any* other, ever *did begin* to exist. And can a Being who *always* existed stand in need of any cause to *bring him* into Being? Surely you confound yourself. The contradiction to Reason would be, in supposing, that a Being who *always* existed was *ever* brought into being at all, either by a cause or without one.

F. The second Proposition is no less contradictory to Reason: How any Being should be the *cause* of its own Existence (p. 160).

Ch. If you mean how God could be the *efficient Cause* of his own Existence, or how he could *bring himself into Being*, you suppose the Existence of God to have been an effect, and brought about by a cause. But this is a mistake, as I have already shewn. No cause either external or internal could bring him into being, who had no beginning of his Existence.—But if you mean the second Proposition in the only sense in which it is true, *viz.* that there must be some *Reason* why God existed always rather than not; it is so far from a difficulty to suppose it, that it is the highest absurdity to suppose the contrary: because, if there was no *Reason* why God should exist rather than not, he never could have existed.

F. There are many other instances of propositions demonstrably true, which are contrary to Reason: the over-ruling grace of the Creator, and the free-will of his creatures; his certain foreknowledge of future Events, and the uncertain contingency of those Events, are to our apprehensions absolute contradictions to each other; and yet the Truth of every one of them is demonstrable from Scripture, Reason, and Experience (p. 161).

Ch. Do Scripture, Reason, or Experience, demonstrate that man is *free* at the same time that he is *over-ruled*; or that God knows that to be *certain*, which is *not* certain, but only *contingent*? Are you sure of the sense in which you propose these questions, or of the facts of which you require a solution? If the question is not determinate, how can the answer be so? You should be certain of the fact before you inquire how it is to be accounted for; and that you are not. The questions, as you propose them, may be as absurd, for any thing you have said, as to ask, how God can know that to be true which is not so.—All these Propositions may therefore be contradictions,

or plane intelligible doctrines, according as they are explained ^a.

F. These difficulties arise from our imagining the mode of Existence of all Beings must be similar to our own: that is, that they must all exist in time and space, and hence proceeds our Embarrassment upon this subject. (p. 161.)

Ch. Not at all. There is no occasion to confuse ourselves with such metaphysical difficulties. On the contrary, I argue from what I know, and am sure of; viz. That an unchangeable Being can not be sometimes One, and sometimes Three: this is a contradiction, not only to his immutability, but to his self-existence, and would lead to Atheism. Besides, why should I believe what is in no part of Revelation; and is contrary to our Reason, as you confess?

F. Our Reason will also inform us, that the punishment of the innocent instead of the guilty, is diametrically opposite to justice, rectitude, and all pretensions to Utility. (p. 162.)

Ch. Why then do you chuse to understand the atonement in such a sense, when, as it lies in the Scripture, it is liable to no such objections?

F. When I say Reason informs us of this (that the punishing the innocent instead of the guilty is contrary to justice, &c.) it should be considered at the same time, that the short line of our Reason cannot reach the bottom of this question. (p. 162.)

Ch. He, whose Reason is unable to fathom the bottom of this question, is unable to understand the very first and fundamental principle of Re-

^a The Reason of a thing is not to be enquired after, says Selden, till you are sure the Thing itself be so. We commonly are at (what's the Reason of it?) before we are sure of the Thing. It was an excellent question of my Lady Cotton, when Sir Robert Cotton was magnifying of a Shoe, which was Moses's, or Noah's, and wondering at the strange fashion of it: but Mr. Cotton, says she, are you sure it is a Shoe?—Table Talk, p. 107.—See the Answer to page 28.

ligion; that God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him: and does not apprehend the difference between justice and injustice; but may think it as just to cut a man's throat, as to relieve his necessities. (p. 120.)

F. But Reason can not inform us by what means Guilt and Punishment ever gained a place in the works of a Creator infinitely good and powerful. (p. 163.)

Cb. Guilt is nothing more than the abuse of free-will; and punishment is proper to deter, chastise, and reform. But the solution of this question, how they gained a place in the works of God, is nothing to the purpose. The punishment of the innocent instead of the guilty is unjust upon every supposition that can be imagined; whatever be the cause of Evil or Guilt.

F. Why may not the sufferings of the individuals be necessary to the happiness and well-being of the whole?

Cb. They certainly may. But Sufferings and Punishment are very different things^a. —A person may suffer voluntarily in hopes of a Reward, and for the joy that is set before him; but punishment can have no reward in view.

F. Sufferings may be levy'd as a Tax for the publick benefit, and be paid by one as well as another; and therefore, if voluntarily offered, be justly accepted of from the innocent as well as the guilty. (p. 163.)

Cb. But punishment can not be levy'd upon any but the guilty consistent with justice: nor accepted by a righteous judge if it was offered^b. Besides, the Taxes which God requires of us are of a very different Nature. God Almighty declares by his Prophets, Is. xxviii. 21. that Punishment is his strange work; and that he does not afflict willingly,

^a Ben. Mor. Let. vii. 97.

^b Ib. 99.

nor grieve the children of men, Lam. iii. 33. Nor hath he any pleasure in the death even of the wicked, Ezek. xxxiii. 2. On the other hand, the prophet Micah has explained to us the nature of the taxes which God requires of us, in the following very remarkable words. Where with shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with Calves of a year old? — Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of Rams, or ten thousands of Rivers of Oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my Soul? — He hath shewed thee O Man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God ^a. — Here we find, that nothing more is required of us than what is *Good*: but if there are any such Taxes to be levied upon us, as you seem to hint at, the sooner you *open the budget*, and let us know what they are, we shall be the sooner out of our pain.

F. Some Men have fancied that there is a merit in sufferings; and have been fainted for whipping themselves; and sitting whole years upon the tops of pillars; and in the Eastern Countries have confined themselves in chairs stuck round with pointed nails ^b.

Ch. True: but we find nothing of this merit spoken of in the Scriptures: nor can Reason teach us that a wise and good God is pleased with his Creatures for doing absurd and foolish things.

F. Notwithstanding the seeming absurdity of this doctrine, there is one thing in its favour: that all nations have agreed in appeasing their offended

^a Mic. vi. 6, 7, 8. 1 Sam. xv. 22. Ps. l. 9.

^b A Free Enquiry into the Origin of Evil, p. 64.—See the Fakeer in Doddsley, vol. vi. p. 306.

Deities, by the vicarious sufferings of men or of other animals. (p. 165.)

Ch. This assertion, I presume, is much too general. When Socrates speaks of sacrifices, he considers them as gifts and bribes, and not as vicarious punishments; both in his 2d Alcibiades and his Eutyphron: but supposing human sacrifices ever so extensive, it will not prove that God Almighty was pleased with them.

F. You can not pretend to say that this Custom was derived from Reason, for it directly contradicts it: nor from ignorance, for that could never have contrived so unaccountable an expedient: It must therefore be derived from natural instinct, or supernatural Revelation, both which are equally the operations of divine power. (p. 165.)

Ch. I don't wonder that a man has a bad opinion of Reason, if he reasons in this manner. Is it possible for a Christian to believe that human sacrifices were instituted by God, and rest his belief upon such an impious argument; that because the doctrine is too contradictory to reason to be invented by men, therefore it must be derived from God! if this argument be just, the more absurd a doctrine is, it bids the fairer to be a divine Revelation.—However, it appears very plainly to me, that human sacrifices arose from superstition; from an ignorance of the nature of God, from mens imagining him to be like themselves before they had cast-off their savage natures, from not distinguishing between Deism and Demonism, or between Jehovah and Moloch: from believing God to be of a cruel unforgiving nature, and pleased with his Creatures misery. And indeed what folly is not superstition equal to? For to speak in your own way, Did Reason teach the Romans to appease the Gods by driving a nail into the Capitol? or to come to the Christian ages, was it

it Reason, or was it not far from the tract of human imagination, to think of making and eating the God of the universe?—Yet we see this is the belief of very learned and pious men, which shews, that if we once discard our reason in divinity, nothing is too absurd to be digested as a sacred Mystery.

F. It is farther urged, that it is inconsistent with the Justice and goodness of the Creator (however true these doctrines may be) to require of his creatures the belief of Propositions, which contradict or are above the reach of that reason, which he has thought proper to bestow on them. To which I answer, that genuine Christianity requires no such belief.

Ch. You answer very truly.

F. I mean, that Christianity has discovered many important truths, and among them, that three Beings are sometimes united in the divine Essence: and that God will accept of the atonement of Christ for the Sins of mankind.—These, considered as declarations of facts only, neither contradict, nor are above our Reason. The one is as plain as that three *equilateral* lines compose one Triangle: the other as intelligible as that one man should discharge the debt of another.

Ch. How came you then to tell us, p. 159, that the one contradicts all the principles of human Reason, and the other all our Ideas of divine Justice?

F. I speak now only of facts, without entering into the question as to the manner *how* the Union is formed,—or why God accepts of vicarious Punishments. To what purpose they may be subservient, we are not informed. (p. 168.)

Ch. You are perfectly right in not inquiring how an *immutable* Being can be sometimes One, and sometimes Three; till you have first proved the fact; or to what purpose a *just* Being punishes the innocent

innocent instead of the guilty; till you are certain that he ever does so.—But what you call Facts, appear to me to be nothing more than mistakes; such as are contradictory to Reason and Scripture^a.

F. I consider them in a very different manner, and look upon them as mysteries (p. 168.); and consequently, that no Information could enable us to comprehend them.

Ch. There are no mysteries ever described in Scripture, to be of such a nature, that “*no information can enable us to comprehend them.*” The word Mystery, as *there* used, generally relates to such things as *have been* already explained, and *always* to such as are supposed to be *capable* of explanation.

F. I speak of such Subjects, as are incomprehensible; whether they are called Mysteries or not. And it is of these important truths, that I say, we are only required to believe the facts, and not to know or believe any thing about them. (p. 168.)

Ch. I understand very clearly, that we can believe the Soul and Body may affect one another; though we have no notion of *the manner how* this is done.—But if there was no known Consequence to be drawn from the knowledge of this fact, I should never call it an *important* truth; nor be easily persuaded that the belief of it was required. Men are not expected to believe merely for believing sake, if there be no consequence of their belief. If that were the case, I don’t know, but there may be as much merit in believing one thing as another.—But why do you expect me to believe what you call *facts*, while they appear to be contrary to *Reason* and *Scripture*?

F. The truth of these doctrines which I have mentioned, must rest entirely upon the authority of those who taught them.—But then we must re-

^a Ben. Mor. Let. vii. p. 162.

flect, that these were the same Persons, who taught us a system of Religion more sublime ; and of Ethics more perfect than our faculties could discover ; but which when discovered are exactly consonant to our Reason, (p. 169.)

Cb. You tell us, in p. 18, that no regular system of Religion was given in the New Testament ; and in p. 17, that a system of Religion may be extracted from it ;—and in p. 175, that Reason is not to examine these Subjects ; and here, that these doctrines are consonant to Reason. Is there a System in the New Testament, or not ? Are we to examine the truth of the doctrines by Reason, or not ? Can you pretend to assert, that it is a doctrine agreeable to Reason, that the Judge of all the World punishes the innocent instead of the Guilty ? It is so contradictory to *my* Reason, that if I should assert it, I should think myself a *blasphemer* : and I would not believe it, though an Angel from Heaven should preach it : Much less can any Authority which is merely derived from teaching a System of Religion or Ethics, without Miracles or Prophecy in attestation to the proof of what they preached, be sufficient to establish the credibility of such a doctrine.

F. But why should we refuse that Credit to Christ and his Apostles, which we think reasonable on some occasions to give to one another ? (p. 169.)

Cb. I know of no one who professes Christianity, and yet refuses to give Credit to Christ and his Apostles.—Or any one, except yourself, who gives such a handle for doing it, by suggesting, that the Evangelists were guilty of pious frauds, in order to deceive and impose upon the Vulgar.—If this was the case, what reason can we have to believe, that Christ said what the Apostles tell us ?—But be that accusation upon your own head with regard to *these Subjects*, Christ and his Apostles are entirely *against* your Hypothesis. The Scripture
plainly

plainly declares, that there is none other God but *One*, 1 Cor. viii. 4. and that this *One* God is the *Father*, (verse 6.) “ Hence doth it plainly follow, “ says Dr. Whitby, that this *One* God of the “ Christians, is *God the Father*, and no other^a. ” and that he will not punish the Innocent for the Guilty ; but judge every man according to his works, appears from St. Matthew^b ; and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him, is asserted by St. Paul, as an essential point of Faith, and the fundamental principle of all Religion, either natural or Reveled^c. And what is it that you give us instead of this ? why first, a compromise with the Polytheists, that God is sometimes *One* Being, and sometimes *Three* : and 2dly, what is more destructive to all Religion than any thing that was ever believed by the heathens, that the judge of all the world punishes the innocent instead of the Guilty. Is it not enough to frighten any man of common Sense from the belief of Christianity, to be told that it contains such doctrines ? But when Men are determined to take up an Hypothesis without due Consideration, they make no scruple to sacrifice Reason, Scripture, Christianity, and every consideration to the support of it.

F. VI. Object. Many have objected to the whole Scheme of this Revelation, as partial, fluctuating, indeterminate, unjust, and unworthy of an omniscient and omnipotent author,—who cannot be supposed to have favoured particular persons, countries, and times, with this divine Communication, while others, no less meritorious, have been altogether excluded from its benefits. 2. Nor to

^a Whitby's last Thoughts. Disc. on 1 Cor. viii. 6. pa. 99.
^b 1 Tim. ii. 5. Ja. ii. 19, &c. ^c Mat. xv. 27. ^d Heb. xi. 6.

have

have changed and counteracted his own designs: that is, to have formed mankind able and disposed to render themselves miserable by their own wickedness: and then to have contrived so strange an expedient to restore them to that happiness which they need never to have been permitted to forfeit: and this to be brought about by the unnecessary interposition of a Mediator. (p. 170.)

Cb. A tremendous accusation! what do you say to it?

F. I shall only say, that however unaccountable this may appear to us, who see but a small part of the Christian Plan, as we see but a small part of the Universal Plan of Creation; they are both, in regard to all these Circumstances, analogous to each other. (p. 171.) But why these things are so, we neither know nor have abilities to comprehend. (p. 173.)

Cb. Do you imagine that any Deist will be convinced of the truth of Christianity by being told, that it is an unaccountable Scheme, which we cannot comprehend. Why do you not endeavour to convince him that it is a rational and consistent Scheme, replete with wisdom, justice, and goodness, and worthy of all acceptance? If you can prove nothing of all this, all you can say besides can be of no service to the cause.

F. Most certainly God might have made the material world a System of beauty and regularity without evils and without remedies: and the Christian dispensation a Scheme only of moral Virtue productive of happiness, without the intervention of any atonement or mediation. And it seems to our ignorance, that this would have been more consistent with justice and reason; but infinite wisdom has decided in another manner. (p. 174.)

Cb. You told us, p. 157, that evil is necessary and unavoidable, and here you tell us quite the contrary. But whether it be necessary or not, your
answer

answer is so far from taking off the objection, that it extends it farther than seems to have been intended by the Deist; and instead of making men Christians, tends to make them Atheists: by telling them, that the whole System of Providence is inconsistent with Reason as well as the Christian Scheme, and subject to the same objections.

F. I only mean to prove, that both the universal Plan of Creation, and that of Christianity, proceed from the same source of divine power and wisdom, however inconsistent with our Reasons the two Plans may appear. (p. 175.)

Ch. But you do not attempt to prove, that either of them proceeds from wisdom, or is consistent with justice and goodness; and if you allow them to be *inconsistent* with *Reason*, you never *can* prove it. But why do you put the objections of the Atheist into the mouth of the Deist? Is this fair dealing? The Atheist objects to the wisdom and goodness of God in the Creation: the Deist maintains them. The Atheist argues against the being of a God: the Deist only argues against the existence of a Revelation. The Atheist objects where he is not a sufficient judge of the argument he uses; and therefore you may say very justly, that he is extremely rash and presumptuous in offering to determine, with regard to the wisdom and goodness of God, upon subjects which he neither understands, nor has faculties to comprehend; but this is not the case of the Deist: In judging of the truth of Christianity, it is necessary for *him* to examine with all his powers, whether it be a *Revelation* from an omniscient and omnipotent, a just and a benevolent God, or whether it be an *Imposture*. And if you should answer, that he has not faculties to comprehend and judge whether it be true or false; you must allow it to be impossible that God should require him to believe it.

In short, the *Atheist* denies the *existence* of a *just* and a *good* God; the *Deist*, from a Sense of his *goodness* and *justness*, is not able to believe a revelation which appears to contradict these attributes. Is not this a very pious and reasonable objection? and how can it be got over, but by proving the Revelation to be just and good?

F. Reason is undoubtedly our surest guide in all matters which lie within the narrow circle of her intelligence: on the subject of Revelation her province is only to examine into its *authority*, and when *that* is once proved, she has no more to do but to acquiesce in its doctrines: and therefore is never so ill employed as when she pretends to accommodate them to her own Ideas of rectitude and truth. (p. 175.)

Ch. I beg to know what authority any Revelation can have; the Proof of which fails in the first Instance. How can we ever know that a doctrine comes from God, which contradicts our Ideas of Rectitude and Truth? Is not this *agreement* what you mean by the *internal Evidence*, and the *excellency*, from which you suppose the internal Evidence to arise? Is it not this very agreement of the doctrine with our Ideas of Rectitude and Truth, from which you judge of its divine Origin? No man of Sense, let the external Evidence be what it will, can receive a Religion that is not accommodated to his Ideas of Rectitude and Truth. He knows that God will never offer to him such a Religion, and will therefore first inquire into the contents of the doctrines: for he knows that no evidence can prove that to be true which is false, nor any thing that contradicts the divine Attributes; and therefore if you will not condescend to prove, that Christianity is capable of being accommodated to such undeniable Truths, in my opinion you give up the cause to the Deists.

F. Reason

F. Reason can be no judge in these matters. God, says the self-sufficient Teacher, is perfectly wise, just, and good; and what is the inference? That all his dispensations must be conformable to his notions of perfect wisdom, justice, and goodness. (p. 175.)

Ch. You mistake his Conclusion for his Premisses, and his Premisses for his Conclusion. He concludes, that God is wise and just, and good; because his works declare him to be so.—How else could he come to the knowledge of his justice, wisdom, and goodness?

F. But it should first be proved, that man is as wise as his Creator, before he can conclude, that the divine dispensations must be conformable to his notions of wisdom, justice, and goodness. (p. 176.)

Ch. Here again you confound yourself with Mr. Pope's argument against the Atheists. A man most certainly affects to be as wise as his Creator, who arraigns the wisdom of God in the Plan of Creation: but surely this cannot be laid to the charge of the pious Christian, who concludes from examining into the doctrines of Christianity, that it is worthy of all acceptation: and agreeable to wisdom, justice, and goodness?

F. But it seems to me, that the dispensations of an *allwise* Being must appear to a Being who is *imperfect* and *ignorant*, to be unreasonable and unjust, and their *seeming impossibility* may be a mark of their *Truth*. (p. 176.)

Ch. If I understand you right, you mean, that the just and reasonable works of a perfect and allwise Being must appear to an imperfect Being to be unreasonable and unjust, and from that consideration to prove, that they are reasonable and just.—This, you say, will in some measure justify the pious Rant of a mad Enthusiast, *Credo quia impossibile*. But why do you say a *mad Enthusiast*? Justify your own Rant first, and take the beam
out

out of your own eye before you attack the first of the Latin Fathers so severely: The self-sufficient Teacher will answer you, that if your argument proves an action to be just, because it appears to be unjust, it must prove the same action to be both just and unjust; and all the conclusions we can make to be both true and false: true, because agreeable to reason; and false, because the conclusion is drawn by ignorant and imperfect Beings. Whereas he argues as every wise man must do in the same case: that Christianity is worthy of all acceptation, and agreeable to justice and goodness, because it appears to be so upon a strict examination. But your argument is a mere burlesque upon the human understanding.

F. It is not in the least surprising, that we are not able to understand the spiritual dispensations of the Almighty, when the material works are no less incomprehensible. Our Reason can afford us no insight into those great properties of matter, gravitation, attraction, elasticity, and electricity: nor even into the essence of matter itself. Can Reason instruct us how the sun's luminous orb can fill a circle, &c. Can Reason tell us how those rays, darted with a velocity greater than that of a cannon ball, can strike the tenderest organs without inflicting pain, &c. &c. &c. (p. 177.)

Ch. The learned need not spend many words to prove, that their ignorance greatly exceeds their knowledge: or that Reason is not able to teach them what is beyond its reach. But will it follow from thence, that Reason will not prove the being of a God, or any thing else that we distinctly and clearly perceive? Will it follow from thence, that we are not certain that it is unjust to punish the innocent instead of the guilty? Let the material world be ever so incomprehensible, our ignorance about it, does not effect our *moral conduct*; nor is it all necessary that we should under-

stand it any better than we do ; unless we were at the day of judgment to pass an examination in natural Philosophy.—But reason will tell us something that is much more to the purpose, than any thing we can learn from the nature of gravitation, attraction, &c. and that is our Duty to God, our neighbour, and ourselves.—And it would be very strange indeed, if our Understanding was to instruct us no farther upon *these* subjects, upon which we are to be hereafter *judged*, than upon the nature of Gravitation and Electricity. — No man, says Selden, is the *wiser* for his Learning ; and I am afraid very few are the *honest* for it ; and it will be our honesty, sincerity, and moral conduct, which we shall be judged by, and not our knowledge of the material world.

F. It is true : but I am speaking of the spiritual dispensations of the Almighty : most certainly our Reason will not explaine these to us. (p. 176.)

Ch. Most certainly it will, as far as it is necessary for us to know them, in order to stand the judgment of the great day : but I know nothing that is required of *us*, more than was required of the *first* Christian Converts : in which there is not a single article, which is above the comprehension of the common people.

F. We can conceive so little of the nature of God and his attributes, or mode of existence ; and so much less of the moral Plan, on which the universe is constituted ; and on what Principle it proceeds ; that if a Revelation from such a Being on such subjects, was in every part familiar to our Understandings, and consonant to our Reason, we should have great reason to suspect its divine authority, and therefore, had this Revelation been less incomprehensible, it would certainly be more incredible. (p. 180.)

Ch. We know *more* of the attributes of *God* than we do of any *other* Being in the Universe : and
all

all knowledge of consequence begins and ends with our knowledge of him.—We know him so well, that we can without the least suspicion trust to his justice and benevolence, with regard to our eternal happiness; but his metaphysical mode of existence, it is not necessary for us to know.—We know more of the material plan of this world than is necessary for our happiness; and enough of the moral plan to direct us to improvement in virtue, which is our chief business in life, and to assure us that God will judge the world in Righteousness, and not punish the innocent instead of the guilty.

F. But does not the incomprehensibility of a Revelation from such a Being make it the more credible? (p. 180)

Cb. Does the Scripture ever give us the least hint of any such thing? Does it not speak the very contrary language? “Come, and let us reason together, saith the Lord,” *Is. i. 18.* “Are not my ways equal? are not your ways unequal?” *Ezek. xviii. 25.* This is the language in which God speaks to us: a language properly adapted to reasonable creatures.—But however, though the Reasons you have given will not defend Christianity in general, I must own they will go a great way in the defence of Popery in particular; many doctrines of that sect being not only incomprehensible, but capable of being proved to be false and absurd; all which, if I understand your argument, may be marks of its truth. (p. 176)

F. If you think that Christianity is not to be defended by these arguments, let us hear how you yourself would answer the objection.

Cb. I should take a quite contrary method; and endeavour to do it, by proving that the Christian Religion is agreeable to Reason and Justice, and worthy of an omniscient and omnipotent Author.—

And to come to the bottom of the question at once, I would ask those Deists who make this objection, Whether God Almighty has not the same right to dispense different *advantages* of life to particular persons of the *same species*, as to the different orders and ranks of Beings? Whether it is not consistent with Justice to suffer the Otaheitees and Patagonians, who have not had the same *opportunities* of improving themselves in morality, to be more ignorant of it than Socrates and Cicero? Whether it is not consistent with Justice, to suffer the *improvements* in all arts and sciences to be made agreeably to the *common course* of things, without any miraculous interposition? I take it for granted that no rational and pious Deist will object that there is any unjust partiality in this.

Let us then, in the next place, procede to consider what are those advantages of Revelation, which are, or are supposed to be, vouchsafed to some men above others; and inquire, whether the same partiality may not also be admitted in that case, without any kind of injustice to any man.

And here I shall first consider a subject which has not been much attended to; and that is, the difference between the Christian Dispensation or Oeconomy *itself*, and the *Revelation* of it to mankind. Now the Christian dispensation, or salvation of the world by Christ, was a general design of God before the world began^a; and by means of it, all mankind shall be raised from the dead, and judged according to their works. This is a general design in which *all the world* is included, and the Deist cannot possibly find any partiality in it: it relates as well to those who lived before the Christian Revelation as to those who never heard of it^b. For the humiliation and obedience of

^a B. Mord. Lett. vi. p. 50.

^b Ibid. Lett. vii. p. 146, &c.

Christ exalted him to be a Prince and Saviour over *all alike*. The redemption from death will be as *general*, the future judgment will be as *general*, the whole effect of his mediation and power will be as *general*, as if it was reveled to *all the world*. The Salvation will not be confined within the small circle of those to whom the nature of it has been *reveled*, but will extend to all to whom the *power* of Christ as our Mediator and Saviour *shall extend*. In short, the power which Christ gained in reward of his meritorious obedience, will be manifested at the day of judgment over *all the families* of the earth; notwithstanding the Revelation of God, given at fundry times and in divers manners, has been ever so much *confined* by the perverseness of mankind, or ever so much *corrupted*. There is nothing therefore that is partial in the system of Christianity itself.

It should farther be considered, that the Deists maintain that there was no occasion for a Revelation, either to preserve them in proper Notions of Religion, or to recover them from their Errors.— If they are consistent in this, they cannot look upon the revelation of the moral duties to be any partiality, because they will tell you they were in no want of any such assistance, as they were all known before.—Nothing therefore remains to the Deists, as I can see, to fix the accusation of partiality upon; but merely, that a *Revelation* was given to one Nation, and not to all Nations at once (which was in time to extend through all the world as fast as they would receive it), declaring the hopes of the heathens (that Virtue should finally be rewarded with glory and honour and immortality, which the wisest of them expected, and by the hopes of which they acted) should certainly come to pass. And this is the whole that the Deistical objection to the partiality of the Gospel Revelation can amount to, according to their Prin-

ciples, *viz.* that the *hopes* of future happiness to the Virtuous was by this Revelation *assured* to them.

What kind of injustice and partiality have they then to complain of, more than we have already considered in a state of Nature, and which they themselves must allow to be consistent with justice and equity, that one person or number of persons shall have greater abilities or opportunities of improvement than another?

Let us now consider the Nature of this Revelation, and the intent of it^a. When it pleased God (upon very great corruption and misuse of the powers of the rational Faculty), in order to prevent a total ignorance of the *one God*, and a *general defection* from Virtue and true Religion, to keep up in one part of the world, by a Revelation of his will, the History of his providence as a moral Governor, and this knowledge was to be propagated to such nations as would pay a regard to it, and receive it; was not this a benefit to mankind? And is it a sufficient objection to the probability of this fact, that the Revelation was not given every where and at all times? It served to good purpose that it was kept up *somewhere*, and it has been dispersed already through a great part of the world: and this revelation prepared the same nation, and through them other nations, to receive a farther instruction, which was foretold to be given in a determinate time. This Revelation, then, was to have a beginning *somewhere*; and, had it been carried on by any other family than that of Abraham, the objection, that it was not universal, would be of the same force with the Deist, that it now is; but that others were equally meritorious at that time with Abraham, does not appear: for God is said to have chosen him, *be-*

^a See Ben Mord. Let. vii. 173.

cause he knew that he would *command* his children, and his household after him, and they should keep the way of the Lord to do justice and judgment^a.—It was therefore no unjust partiality that this Revelation should begin with Abraham.—After this, it pleased God to send our Saviour into the world to give us farther instruction; and prepared this same nation to receive him, by the accomplishment of Prophecy. This extraordinary Person was to revele to mankind that it was the will of God to give eternal life and happiness to the Virtuous; that Christ himself was to be the judge of quick and dead, in reward of his meritorious obedience even to death, &c. But as this *Revelation* could not be otherwise than *partial*, as opposed to *universal*, it can be no objection to it that Christ did not suffer and die every where, and at all times; nor that he began this farther Revelation where he was expected, and where it would appear to be a continuance of the History of Providence, rather than where he was not at all known or expected. I argue therefore from the very principles of sober Deism, that the first part of this objection, *viz.* that the Christian Revelation is partial, unjust, &c. is proved to be groundless.—But it should be farther observed, to defend the justice of this seeming partiality, that every man will be judged hereafter, by the same Mediator between God and man, with regard to his behaviour in this world, according to the particular circumstances in which he has been placed, and the particular opportunities and talents with which he has been entrusted; and this must be a proof of the justice and equity of the general judgment, whether a man's powers, opportunities, and talents, be great or small, and whether he has been favoured with a Revelation or not.

^a Gen. xviii. 19.

F. But it is farther objected by the Deists, that God has changed and counteracted his own designs, having formed men able and disposed to render themselves miserable, and then contrived so strange an expedient to restore them that happiness which they never need have been permitted to forfeit, and this to be brought about by the *unnecessary* Interposition of a Mediator (p. 170).

Ch. You have so jumbled together, in this Objection, the notions of the Atheists and Deists, that I can't see how it could be drawn up by either of them.—Let us endeavour to separate them, and restore to each of them his proper part of the objection.

The only part of it, which you can properly put into the mouth of the Atheist, is this: *That a wise and just God would not have formed men able and disposed to render themselves miserable, and then found out an expedient to restore them to that happiness which they needed not to have been permitted to forfeit: for this would be to counteract his own designs, and prove him to be inconsistent.*—You must see plainly that this argument is objected against the Being of a God, and not against Christianity any more than against Deism.—For the Deists make *no objection* to the doctrine, that God has formed men *able* to render themselves miserable, or that he has *permitted* them to do it.—Nor have they any objection to *free will*; nor to any expedient which they may think reasonable to restore men to that happiness from which their sins would have otherwise excluded them. The *Deist* acquiesces in all this; and it was the belief of Socrates, Cicero, &c. It is only denied by the *Atheist*. However, let us examine into it.

As far as a double plan is here supposed, and that God has counteracted his own designs; it has been answered by yourself, from observing, that God has not formed two opposite plans, one of
Creation,

Creation, and the other of Religion ; but one single plan ONLY, making this world a state of probation and improvement : so that it does not appear, that God has ever changed or counteracted his own designs, but carried on from the beginning one and the same plan, according as the circumstances required (p. 24, 25, 26).

But the Atheist farther objects, *that God has formed men able to render themselves miserable, which they need not to have been permitted to do.* Now I presume that the Atheist does not mean by this, to object against the *existence* of such an *order of Beings* as *man* ; but only, that man is *not prevented from making himself miserable* by the misuse of Free-will.—And this being supposed to be his meaning, I shall go on to consider whether his Happiness would be increased, or his circumstances amended, if he was deprived of that power by which he is enabled to render himself miserable.

Now Happiness is of two kinds. The one kind arises from our outward circumstances ; the other from our inward consciousness^a. But if the Atheist expects that men should enjoy them both without the use of free-will, he aims at Impossibilities.—Hear what the very ingenious and worthy Minstrel sings to this purpose to his Pupil :

But let untender thoughts afar be driven,
Nor venture to arraign the dread decree ;
For know, to man, as candidate for heaven,
The voice of the Eternal said, be FREE.
And this divine prerogative to thee
Does virtue, happiness, and heaven convey.
For Virtue is the *child of Liberty* ;
And Happiness of Virtue : nor can they
Be FREE to keep the path, who are not FREE
to stray.

Minst. 2 B. St. 31.

^a See Ben Mord. Lett. v. p. 9.

If

If men were not capable of making themselves miserable, *i. e.* if they were not endow'd with free-will, one of the greatest inlets to happiness would be intirely shut up and lost. They could not become virtuous, nor consequently be conscious of their virtue, nor recommend themselves to their Creator's favour, nor receive from the Judge of all the world the *judicial* reward of Virtue. All this happiness, which is now enjoyed by the best of men, must be lost, if we were deprived of free-will, for the sake of indulging the worst of men in their vices.

F. But why should men be [so much] disposed to render themselves miserable? (p. 171)

Ch. From whence have you derived that strange opinion? Men may mistake the way to happiness; but no man upon earth ever found himself disposed to make himself miserable.

F. Do not all our passions, appetites, inclinations, and affections, tend to lead us into error and vice?

Ch. Are not all these the inlets to pleasure, comfort, and happiness in this world, both animal and rational? That the abuse of them leads us into vice, is true: but has not God provided against this misfortune, by giving us understanding to guide and direct our passions to their proper objects? The fire will warm and comfort us at the proper distance which our understanding directs; but if we will throw ourselves into it, contrary to the dictates of the understanding, can we, with any reason, charge our follies upon Providence?—On the other hand, I should wish to see you delineate, upon your own Plan, how the happiness of mankind in this world, or, I may add, the happiness of any other creatures any where, can possibly be carried on without the use of the passions? and if you are not able even to conceive such a Plan, your objection must favour, to a very high

high degree, both of ignorance and presumption : and what happiness could a rational Being possibly enjoy, if he lived under continual Restraint upon his will? I am afraid, upon this unintelligible plan, we should have no happiness at all.—But, be that as it may, can any one seriously believe that it would be consistent with the attributes of the *great* and *good* Governor of the universe, to pay such a compliment to vice, at the expence of Virtue, as to make good men *incapable* of Virtue and reward, for the sake of preventing the vicious from running into vice and misery? Every wise man must confess, that things are much better ordered, as they are, for the benefit of the Virtuous ; and the wicked and worthless (*fruges consumere nati, sponsi Penelopes, Nebulones, Alcinoique*), if they will not be persuaded to laudable actions, and to seek for happiness by deserving it, must look to themselves, and take the consequence.

F. But what do you answer to that part of the objection which supposes Christianity to be fluctuating and indeterminate?

Cb. As you have said so little upon this subject, I can only answer by considering it, as it is more fully explained by Tindal, in his “ Christianity as “ old as the Creation : ”—where, after considering the uncertainty that must arise to the Christian Revelation, from the variation in the sense of words (p. 286), and the interest of designing men to put a wrong sense on them (p. 288), and the hyperbolic, parabolical, mystical, allegorical, and typical ways of expression (p. 290), he says, “ If men “ were to depend upon the words, and their precise meaning, and not on the things themselves “ and their relations, they would be intirely governed by sound : and again, as, generally, more “ is expressed than mean’d, and things of the “ greatest consequence are often so treated as that “ men cannot from thence perceive the nature “ and

“ and extent of their duty : and even precepts
 “ of the greatest moment are sometimes so far
 “ from being delivered plainly and simply, that
 “ they are expressed under a general undetermined
 “ and hyperbolical manner ; even in this case
 “ there is a necessity for the common people to
 “ have recourse to the reason of things.” (p. 236.)

Now I am so far from imagining there is any danger in allowing, that we are not to be governed by the words of Scripture, but by the sense, that I fully assent to it ; and have already observed, that the understanding will make up for all such uncertainties as are left in the precise meaning of the letter, as to the boundaries of their duties, or the nature of them.—And if the understanding is referred to in all these cases, and the Texts are properly compared together, and explained by the same Rule of Criticism by which we understand other writings ; the sense of the Scripture will be neither *fluctuating* nor *undeterminate* upon any one subject, that is of consequence to our salvation ; and as to the other points, it is of little signification, whether they are undeterminate or not.

F. But is it not a strange expedient to restore men to happiness by the unnecessary interposition of a mediator ?

Ch. The whole scheme of our Redemption by a mediator is wonderful, and shews the most amazing proof of *goodness* and *rectitude* in the government of the world : but I can see nothing *strange* in it in any other sense. Is it *strange* that a good and merciful God should send into the world a Being of superior excellence to man, in order to instruct them ; or that this Person should be *murthered* by those he was sent to reform ; or that God should *reward* so faithful a witness with the greatest of all conceivable blessings, the power of conferring happiness and giving eternal Life ? and that he should dispense his favours to mankind

by

by him, as he dispenses them to a family or kingdom *through a parent or king*? Or is it *strange* that Jesus Christ should undertake such an amazing humiliation to save the world he made? Or can it be shewn, that in the gracious business of restoring men to happiness, it was more necessary that God should act immediately by his own power, than in every other affair in Life ^a? In all other cases, he acts by his Creatures, whom he uses as his *instruments* to bring about his decrees: and are we to wonder that he does not bring about his designs by miracle, and thereby render their actions useless and unnecessary?—But in this particular act (of giving eternal Life to all men who were fit to receive it, though they had not obeyed the terms upon which it was promised) we are entirely ignorant whether it could by any *other means* have been brought about, so consistently with a manifest regard to righteousness, and by the encouragement of it; *as* by giving this power into the hands of a Mediator in reward of his meritorious obedience ^b. And how *strange* soever these things may seem, yet, when reveled, they must appear to every noble, generous, and enlarged mind, to be agreeable to their Idea of the all-perfect Character, and to form a scheme worthy of all acceptation. But if men will chuse to explaine things in such a manner, as debases the God of all mercies; and makes the whole doctrine intricate and contradictory to Reason and the divine Attributes, their Faith will be as *strange* as their Fancies ^c.

F. I shall not enter farther into these abstruse and difficult speculations; because the discussion of them would be too tedious a task for the perusal of *them*, for *whom* it is principally intended, which are all those busy and idle persons, whose time

^a Ben. Mor. Let. vi. 83.

^b Ibid. Let. v. 48.

^c See Ben. Mor. Let. vi. 82, &c.

and

and thoughts are wholly engrossed by the pursuit of business or pleasure. (p. 180.)

Cb. This is the very thing that causes so much Deism; that men will not examine the grounds of Christianity and the sense of its doctrines to the bottom. They seem to be afraid to do it, and the reason of this fear arises, generally, from their having admitted, among their articles of faith, several doctrines which are the inventions of men: and when *these* are in danger of being refuted by reason and argument, they begin to fear for Christianity itself, as the Papists do upon the refuting Transubstantiation. Whereas Christianity itself is founded upon a Rock; and the more strictly it is examined, the more it will be believed; because the greater evidence will thereby appear in proof of it, and we shall be the better able to give a reason of our Faith. — On the other hand, I know no difference between believing the Christian Religion to be false, and believing the objections to it to be unanswerable. — And therefore I think your Pupils are but little beholden to you for raising so many objections to it as you have done, and then leaving them, as it were, in a labyrinth, without any clue to direct them how to get out of it.

F. Why should I say any thing more to such as know nothing of this Religion, but what they have accidentally picked up by desultory conversation, or superficial reading: and have thence determined with themselves, (1.) That a pretended Revelation founded on so strange a Story, (2.) so contradictory to Reason; (3.) so adverse to the world and all its occupations; (4.) so incredible in its doctrines; (5) in its precepts so impracticable, can be nothing more than the imposition of Priestcraft upon ignorant and illiterate ages: and artfully continued, as an engine well adapted to awe and govern the superstitious Vulgar; (p. 181.) by a
confused

confused Rhapsody of fictions and absurdities. (p. 184)

Ch. You shall never persuade me that this regular system of objections was ever made by such idle thoughtless people as you have described. These men must have studied the subject as carefully as you have done yourself, to become such perfect adepts in Deism. But if you really designed to recommend Christianity to your Pupils, why have you not shewn them their Errors, and proved, (1st.) That Christianity is not founded on a strange Story. (2.) That it is not contrary to Reason. (3.) That it is not adverse to the world and all its occupations any more than Reason and Philosophy. (4.) That it is not incredible in its doctrine. (5.) That it is not impracticable in its precepts? — Whereas, by leaving all these objections in their full force, your Pupils must be affrighted from a belief of such a Religion, and think you are writing in favour of Deism, as many serious Christians have suspected.

F. To talk with such men as I speak of, about Religion, is to converse with the deaf concerning musick, or the blind on the beauties of painting.

Ch. They rather seem to be like the man, who had lost just half his memory. He could remember all that was owed to him, but not what he owed; so these pupils of yours seem to have lost just *half* their *understanding*: they have a hawk's eye at an *objection* to Christianity; but to the *answers*, they are as blind as a mole.

F. They want all Ideas relative to the subject, and therefore cannot be made to comprehend it.

Ch. So much the better; they will be the sooner converted: for the more *incomprehensible* a doctrine is, if you remember, it must be the *more credible*. (p. 180.) I should begin to have some hopes of these deaf and blind men, if they did not seem by their

their wilful blindness to want good hearts, rather than good heads.

F. It is impossible they should know any thing about it unless their minds be first formed for these conceptions by contemplation, retirement, abstraction from business and dissipation, by ill health, disappointments, distresses, &c. (p. 182.)

Ch. What do you think now of a good smart fit of the gout? this would do the business to a miracle; for as the Poet sings,

As in some free and well-pois'd common-weal

Sedition warns the Rulers how to steer;

As storms and thunders rattling with loud peal,

From noxious dregs the dull horizon clear.

So when the mind imbrutes in sloth supine,

Sharp pangs awake the *energy divine*.

This medicine is much more simple than your *complicated regimen*; — But in truth, a man must think *carefully* and *seriously* upon every subject he would *understand*: And if he would spend a tenth part of the thought upon Religion, that he does upon his pleasures or the common affairs of life, he would understand all that is necessary about it. But learned men love to flatter themselves with the notion, that they know more than the rest of the world: and therefore make mysteries and difficulties merely for the pleasure of being thought to understand them: but if any one will read the disputes of the learned at the Council of Trent, he will find the learned know as little of the matter upon such subjects as the ignorant mechanick; when once they come to explaining Mysteries, *actum est*, it is all over with them.

F. You must surely allow, that a competent degree of Learning is necessary to believe Christianity. — The use of Reason was indeed considerable, when Christianity was first preached by the illiterate and received by the ignorant, because
the

the *practical parts* were the *chief* parts, and they were *intelligible*.

Ch. If the use of Reason was considerable upon that account, when Christianity was first preached, it must still continue to be so : Because the practical parts are *still* the chief, and are *still* intelligible. The whole Revelation was given for the sake of the practical Parts.

F. But the proofs of its authority at present, must be drawn from *other* parts of a *speculative* nature, opening to our inquiries *inexhaustible discoveries*, and from these the generality of men must necessarily be excluded, and must trust to others for the grounds of their belief, if they believe at all. (p. 185.)

Ch. The *proofs* of the authority of Christianity, or the *grounds* on which it is founded, do not at all depend upon any *inexhaustible discoveries* ; but the proof of those discoveries depends upon external Evidence ; which any man is a judge of, who is fit to be trusted upon a jury, or capable of managing his own affairs.

I know that Tindal, in his *Christianity as old as the Creation*, argues as you do, and makes a formidable and pompous objection of it^a ; but it is fully answered by Dr. James Foster, in his book, intituled, *The Usefulness and Excellency of the Christian Religion*^b. But answering books is of very little use to the Deists. They attack like the Danes, under distinct and separate Banners, and the silencing one Detachment has no effect upon another.—But to return to the subject. The unlearned can judge as well as the learned, whether a traditional Revelation be agreeable to their own notions of right and wrong, and whether it appears to them to be worthy of God in its design to im-

^a Pa. 232, 233, 234.

^b Foster, 174.

prove the world in Virtue. And if this appears, the only question remaining will be, whether the unlearned are capable, by the assistance of the learned (without an implicit Faith in any one) to form a rational judgment of the credibility of the Gospel History, and the evidence of Miracles and Prophecy upon which it rests. — And surely, if the learned are sensible of the proofs themselves, they can explain their sentiments to others: and the unlearned may receive an explicit information from them, as well as the learned can from one another.

F. But ought they not to conclude, that it is as possible for *them* to be mistaken in disbelieving a Revelation (who know nothing of the matter) as it is for the great Masters of Reason and Erudition to have been mistaken in believing it. Such as Grotius, Bacon, &c. Reason uninformed is not to be depended upon. (p. 186.)

Ch. They have no business to conclude any thing about it. They know that Grotius, Bacon, &c. were fallible men as well as themselves, and consequently, that they ought not to risque their Faith upon their opinions without hearing the reasons upon which their opinions are founded. — But you talk of these great men, and yet you thwart the authority of the first you refer-to, in this very question. If Grotius had argued as you do, he would, like you, have referred his unlearned countrymen to the great authorities that lived before him; but he thought them very capable of reasoning justly, and wrote a proof of the Truth of the Christian Religion for the use of the common sailors. — And in truth, if men are capable of knowing who are to be trusted in this inquiry, they must be capable of understanding their Reasons. For, as Cicero says, it is the chief mark of a wise man to know who are such ^a. There

^a Thoughts of Cic. 319. Acad. ii. 3.

is no occasion, therefore, that even the ignorant should depend upon reason uninformed, which must be the case of an implicit faith. But this argument does not properly belong to the Deist, but to the Atheist; for if Reason cannot understand the proofs of Christianity, it will never be able to investigate the Religion of Nature: and if it is a good argument against Christianity, it is equally strong against Deism. And the Deist must argue against the Atheist in defence of *natural Religion* in the very same way, in which the Christian argues against the Deist in defence of Christianity.

F. I should hope the foregoing pages may persuade some of these minute Philosophers to place some confidence in these great opinions, and distrust their own.

Ch. But what are they to do, if they distrust their own opinion in the choice of an instructor? Or, if they are to chuse an instructor merely upon account of his great erudition, why do you recommend them to the Protestant divines particularly? Why not to the Rabbies? Why not to the Mahometans, who have written very learnedly? Why not to the Roman church? In short, if men are to pay an implicit obedience to the sentiments of the Learned without hearing their reasons, they may as well chuse their Religion by the cast of the die.

F. If these pages should persuade any one that Christianity may not be *altogether* artifice and error; if they should prevale on them to examine it with some attention, and not to reject it without any examination at all, my end would be answered.

Ch. It will be but of little comfort or service to any man, to believe, in general, that Christianity is not *altogether* artifice and error; unless he

could distinguish, by some certain marks, the artifice and error from the Christianity. And if he so far distrusts his Reason as to conclude that it may be the sign that a proposition is true, that it appears to be false (p. 176); if he believes that propositions can be demonstrated contrary to Reason (p. 160); if he believes the doctrines of the New Testament in such a sense, that one of them shall contradict all the principles of human Reason, and another all our Ideas of Divine Justice (p. 159); if he believes that God Almighty ever did; or ever will, punish the innocent instead of the guilty; if he believes that the Evangelists were guilty of pious frauds, accommodating their stories to the ignorance and superstition of the times, or to impress on vulgar minds higher reverence of the sanctity and power of Christ (p. 125); such a man must be so deeply immersed in Scepticism, as to find no rest to the sole of his foot, either in Christianity or Deism: a situation truly deplorable!

On the contrary, happy is that man, who is not only *almost* a Christian, but *altogether* such: whose trust in God is so firmly founded on the knowledge of his divine attributes (which are capable of the strictest demonstration), that he can never, for a moment, suspect his goodness, justice, wisdom, truth, or love: and whose belief of Revelation rests upon the attestation of God himself, and is assured to him by the accomplishment of prophecy, which he sees and knows to be true*. The precepts of the Gospel will appear to him perfectly agreeable to the nature of an all-wise moral Governor of the universe to give, and to the nature of rational Beings to receive as the rules of their conduct. His love of God,

* Ben Mor. Lett. vii.

whom

whom he beholds as a tender parent, using all proper means to bring his children to virtue and happiness, will cast a continual serenity upon his mind, which no evils will be able to discompose and ruffle; and render the practice of his duty a pleasure. Nay, even Evils themselves will seem to change their natures in a great measure; and appear to be nothing more than necessary trials, and exercises of his patience, prudence, fortitude, faith, and resignation, necessary to fix him more firmly in a state of moral perfection.—Reason and Revelation will never be at variance in his mind, nor suggest the least suspicion that his happiness is neglected in this world; or that his endeavours after perfection will miss of their proper Reward of Glory, and Honour, and Immortality, in the world to come.

F. My good Friend, I am very much obliged to you for the trouble I have given you: I find my mind much easier than it was; and shall, from henceforth, consider my Religion, founded on these plain and consistent Principles, to be the greatest comfort of my Life.

F I N I S.

ERRATA.

Page 13 read ΘΙΟΥ

17 note, r. of Cic.

19 l. 9 r. prays-for

note ^a, for 28, r. 21, 22, 23.

27 l. 8 *dele* same

32 l. 34 r. accomplishment

43 l. 7 *for* whom r. which

l. 36 r. shew

48 l. 6 r. ἔτιυξε

24 *after* made *add* page 29.

25 *dele* page 29.

63 r. Ἀχιλεῦ

65 l. 22 r. precept

72 note, r. of Cic.

73 note, r. page 44.

78 l. 1 *after* Martyrdom, *add* the Letter or
reference ^a

101 l. 28 r. to Reason

107 l. 24 r. *for* as r. and

119 l. 15 r. disapproving

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